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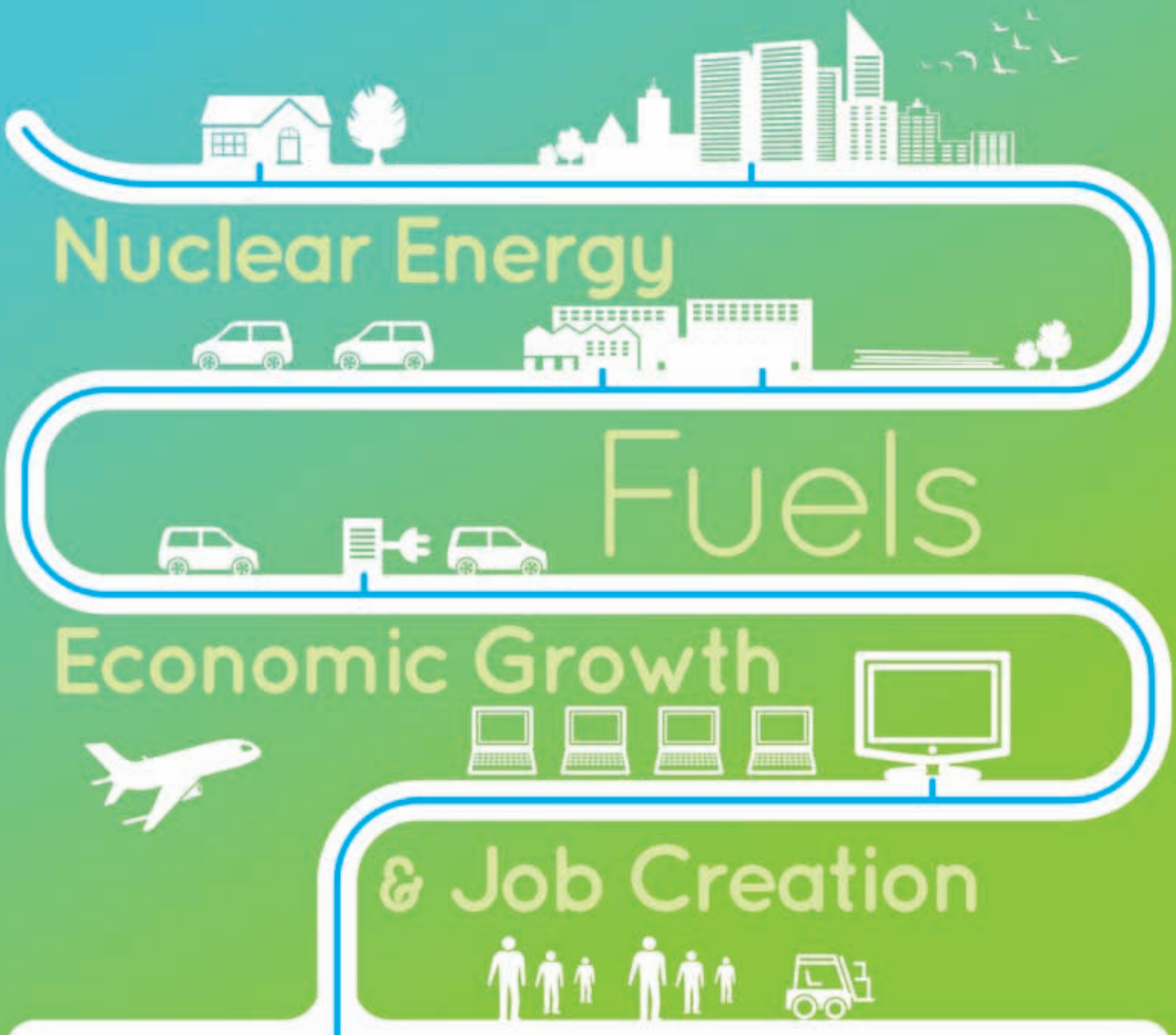

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Journal of Politics and the Arts

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MSM, RIP

There are few media metrics that point in an upward direction these days. Disdain of the press is one of them. Thirty-six percent of Americans now say that the press "hurts" democracy. Many others wouldn't express their feelings in quite such violent terms but share the basic disrespectful sentiment. Put another way, the crisis in journalism is even deeper than the crisis in its business model. It is suffering a crisis of legitimacy.

We all know the long list of scandals that has bloodied the profession—from Jayson Blair to Judith Miller to Dan Rather. But to focus only on these wrecks both misses the point and blames the victim. Just as the press has been slammed by the tides of technology, it has been hit hard by the political culture. The master narratives of both the right and the left have come to include the same villain: the hypocritical, biased elite media. And their combined grouching has helped foment the anti-media backlash.

On the right, the history of press-bashing is venerable—Spiro Agnew's "nattering nabobs" and all that. But during the Bush years, and thanks to Fox News, the critique of the liberal media was canonized, beginning with the charge that the media abetted Al Gore's efforts to steal the Florida recount. Bernard Goldberg's *Bias* is in many (all unfortunate) ways a defining text of the times. A former CBS reporter, Goldberg claimed to have provided a firsthand account of his colleagues' disgraceful manipulation. "[Journalistic] elites are hopelessly out of touch with everyday Americans. Their friends are liberals, just as they are," he wrote. "After a while they start to believe that all civilized people think the same way they and their friends do." Following *Bias*'s leap to the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list, Bush was photographed walking with Goldberg's screed tucked under his arm.

A mirror version of this critique emerged on the left. In this telling, it was the timid, lazy press corps that failed to rigorously challenge the president's core (mendacious) claims about his tax cuts and rationale for heading to war. Very valid criticisms. But these specific objections morphed into populist broadsides against what the left came to describe as "the mainstream media"—avatars of establishmentarian groupthink who bend to the latest conventional wisdom emerging from D.C. cocktail parties and neurotically fret that they might be just as biased as their conservative critics allege. On *The Huffington Post* and its ilk, you would find rants about how "Beltway media really makes no effort to do anything other than parrot totally out-of-touch conventional wisdom—no matter how inane, stupid and ridiculous it is."

This rhetoric creates a poisonous atmosphere. By assaulting the credibility of the press, it destroys its authority in the culture, giving cover to politicians who would rather avoid dealing with reporters in the first place. The most egregious example, of course, is the Bush administration, whose chief of staff Andy Card once told *The New Yorker* that the press doesn't "represent the public any more than other people do." He added, "I don't believe you have a check-and-balance function." And that was precisely the spirit that guided Bush's refusal to release critical documents and his decision to hold presidential press conferences only rarely. When the administration needed to make its case, it took to the local press or Fox News, where it had no fear of probing questions.

At times, Obama has hinted that he will borrow from the Bush playbook and deal with the press only as he pleases, using new technology to vault over the old arbiters. Fortunately, that hasn't been his methodology in recent weeks; instead, he has revived the Freedom of Information Act, sat for many interviews, and even ventured to dinner at George Will's house. This is fortunate, because Obama is presiding over a turning-point moment in media history.

Obama can help set a tone for liberals, convincing them to ratchet down their hostility to newspapers and begin crusading on behalf of these imperiled organizations. The media deserves liberal critics, who hold it accountable. But it also deserves liberal defenders because a press working toward the ideal of objectivity is often the only means of blunting government or business run amok. (See Paul Starr's "Goodbye to the Age of Newspapers," page 28, for an eloquent account of the catastrophic consequences that will follow the mainstream media's collapse.) Even the press's fiercest critics have been forced to acknowledge and fear its findings—an authority that will never exist in a world consisting entirely of partisan outlets. That's why Andy Card's old boss was ultimately forced to concede the existence of torture and black sites and the shame of Walter Reed.

Many venerable newspapers and magazines will close in the coming weeks and months; the ones that remain will be attenuated. But the old ideals embodied in these institutions must not be permitted to join the carnage. ◆

Edel Rodriguez

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Hurry Up and Waste

Why Obama should have built more crap.

JONATHAN CHAIT

Republicans like to accuse Democrats of wasting taxpayer dollars and being condescending eggheads. But if President Obama's economic stimulus fails to prevent a depression—and I'm not saying it will—it will be because he didn't waste enough money, and didn't spend enough time being a condescending egghead.

Let's start with the egghead part. The stimulus bill is based on Keynesian theory, which I'll briefly explain in the condescending manner we liberals so enjoy using. When we're in a severe recession, good productive capacity goes to waste. Autoworkers sit home unemployed because nobody has money to buy cars, and cooks sit home unemployed because nobody has money to go out to dinner. The first thing for government to try is to reduce interest rates, to encourage businesses to borrow money to hire more workers and buy equipment. But, if interest rates hit bottom, then the government has to shock the system back to life by spending money directly. Say, Washington hires construction workers to build something, and those workers start buying cars and going to restaurants, and, after a while, the economy is running again.

So Obama decided to spend a lot of money. The Republicans' hoary opposition technique is to boil any legislation down to one or two silly-sounding expenditures that Joe Sixpack can understand—Midnight basketball! A bear DNA study! Obama anticipated this critique and tried to eliminate all waste from the bill. He kept earmarks out and focused the spending on public investments like energy efficiency and education. The logic went beyond just politics. If you're going to spend a lot of money, you might as well get something useful for it.

Yet a few downsides to this clever tactic have emerged. First, a stimulus can shock the economy back to life if it happens quickly, but there are only so many useful projects you can spend money on really fast. Mass transit and new electrical grids take years to plan and build. There are worthwhile programs you can fund right away, but the list runs dry after a few hundred billion dollars. So the stimulus is less than half the size of the projected drop in output. It might be enough to stave off disaster, but then again, it might not.

Second, by emphasizing the worthiness of his spending proposals, Obama has allowed the debate to revolve around the merits of each project. Normal spending is judged on those terms—whether the goods or services justify their cost. The point of stimulus spending, by contrast, is simply *to spend* money—on something useful if possible, wasteful if necessary. Keynes proposed burying money in mineshafts, so that workers would be hired to dig it out. (Imagine what the GOP could do with material like *that*.) World War II was an effective stimulus that, economically speaking, consisted of 100 percent waste. If war hadn't broken out, we could have enjoyed the same economic benefit by building all those tanks and planes and dumping them into the ocean.

Third, Republicans have simply carried on as if the stimulus were filled with pork anyway. In fact, the bill contains either zero pork or a vanishingly tiny amount, depending on how you define the term. But that didn't stop Rush Limbaugh from calling the bill "porkulus," showing, for a man of his girth, an unusual lack of self-consciousness about deploying porcine-themed insults.

Even before the bill was written, Republicans decided its prototypical measure was a "mob museum" in Las Vegas. The basis for this claim was not that there was legislation funding a mob museum, or even that such legislation had some chance of becoming law, but that Las Vegas had *wanted* funding for a mob museum. Congress not only declined to fund a mob museum, it bent over so far backward to avoid frivolous projects that it forbade any funds going to a "casino or other gambling establishment, aquarium, zoo, golf course, swimming pool, stadium, community park, museum, theater, art center, and highway beautification project." (Because Lord knows the government has no business funding things like zoos or museums.)

Congressional Republicans have continued to churn out lists of "wasteful" spending in the stimulus bill, highlighting such outrages as funding for Amtrak, making federal buildings more energy-efficient, flood-reduction projects on the Mississippi River, and the like. They have assailed the bill as a "wish list." Well, yes. If you suddenly had to spend $10,000, would you spend it on things you'd always wanted, or would you spend it on something you'd never even considered before?

The mass ignorance on display was best exemplified by the contretemps over a provision to help undergird hemorrhaging state budgets. Most states are required to balance their budgets annually. During downturns, their revenue collapses and their costs (on things like Medicaid) rise. This forces the states to raise taxes and cut spending, the exact opposite of what you want in a recession. Thus, the notion of giving federal money to the states was probably the single most defensible provision in the whole bill. Naturally, it became a particular target of conservative ire. A *Weekly Standard* editorial declared:

> It's hard to argue that the $248 billion in transfers to the states will stimulate the economy. The money is being taken from one pot and put in another so that the states can balance their books and ensure the proper treatment of beneficiaries. It doesn't prime the pump. It just keeps the pump from falling apart.

It's a breathtaking passage. It begins by insisting that helping state budgets won't stimulate the economy, then proceeds to methodically undercut its own assertion by pointing out that the stimulus will help states avoid cutting spending or raising taxes, and concludes with a metaphor that clinches the case: After all, keeping the pump from falling apart is a *good* idea, isn't it?

Part of the problem here is that Obama never explained the theoretical basis for his plan. Even moderate journalists and members of Congress don't understand it. Democratic Senator Ben Nelson cut state budget support, which he called "non-stimulative" spending, apparently unaware that this is a contradiction in terms.

In his press conference last Monday night, Obama summed up his approach like so: "I think that, over time, people respond to civility and rational argument." A little intellectual condescension wouldn't hurt, though. ◆

TRB
From Washington

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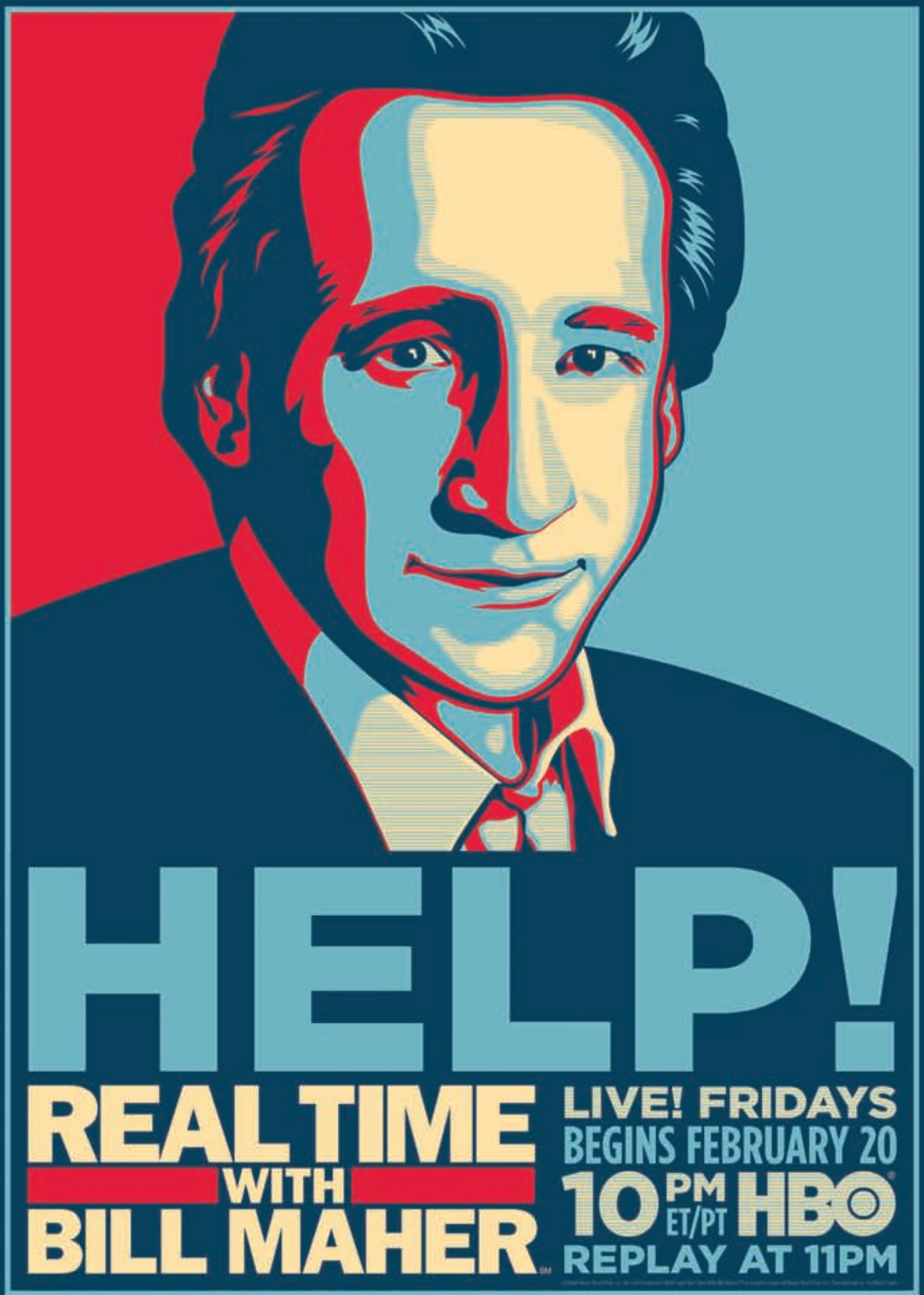

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The Mall

Falun Gong Show

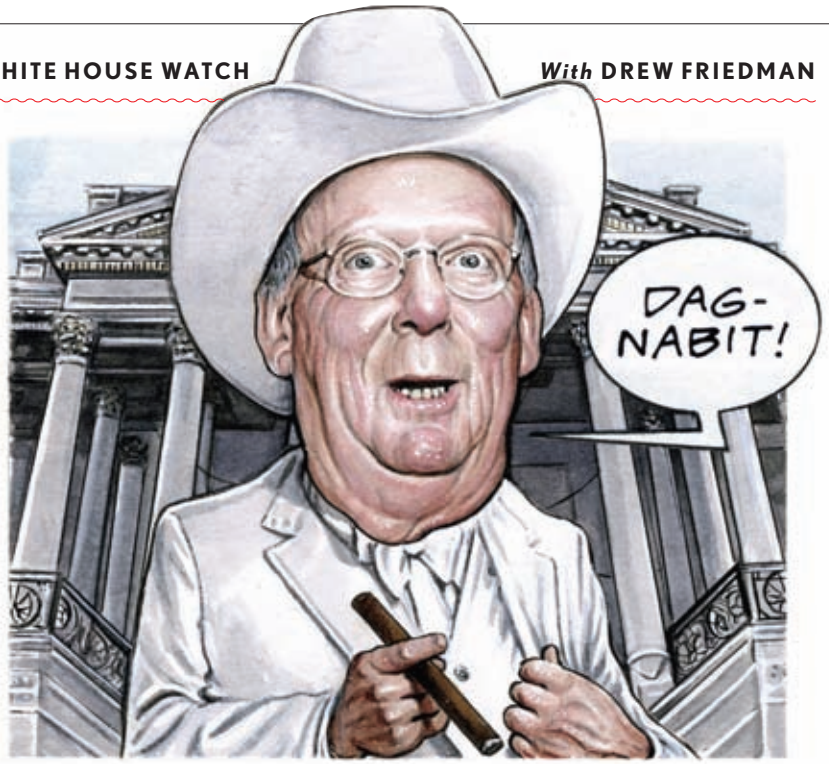
The weird cult that hijacked my Chinese New Year.

My siblings and I took my parents to the Radio City Music Hall "Chinese New Year Splendor" show out of a mix of nostalgia and excitement. Nothing had spelled America more to my Chinese immigrant parents than Radio City's Christmas show, and we were all looking forward, first of all, to revisiting the Art Deco bathrooms. Also, though, we were looking forward to seeing something we never could have imagined when I was growing up: something "Chinese" on the Great Stage. It's true we had never pined for "representation" in such venues; if you gave my father a choice between people who looked like us and the real-live camels of the Christmas pageant, I'm sure he would pick the camels. If you gave him a choice between the typically Asian-legged and the Rockettes, too—well. Still, how amazing to imagine the stage populated with the former, just this once.

Most of the show was the sort of boilerplate Chinese entertainment we might have found on a cruise ship—one part flowing sleeves, one part Intro to Chinese History and Culture. The founding of Chinese culture by the Yellow Emperor 5,000 years ago. The story of the woman warrior, Mulan. Happy minority dances from happy places like Tibet. No bare leg. The Divine Performing Arts group did seem to place more emphasis on the "divine" in their name than one might have anticipated: The Yellow Emperor was flanked by buddhas and bodhisattvas; and, in another number (a most Chinese version of the Prometheus myth), poor earthlings trying to jot things down with chisels were suddenly granted a miraculous "system upgrade" (as the announcer put it). First, an erstwhile solid mountain opened, James Bond–style. Then out of its maw jetted a bodhisattva bearing—ta-daa—a writing brush! Jetting bodhisattvas were, in general, a theme, as were mountains giving way, with one turning into a heap of rubble—an eerie echo of last year's Sichuan earthquake. Mostly, though, the show was, as my father put it, "chow mein." The pretty music and pretty costumes, well-steeped in "authenticity," made for many a happy Asian and non-Asian face in the sold-out hall, my parents' among them. Then began, to our surprise, a program of Falun Gong Dafa agitprop.

A soprano sang feelingly, "For whom do we brave the elements? . . . / Standing on the sidewalk, followers of Dafa / Leaflets in hand born of effort and compassion / For but one purpose: to spare you misfortune / Knowing the true picture, the road ahead will be clear to you . . . . / We wish only to share with you a hopeful tomorrow." This was followed, a bit later in the program, by "Heaven Awaits Us Despite Persecution," in which wholesome, golden-shirted Dafa practitioners living peacefully in a village were beaten mercilessly by thugs with red hammer-and-sickles emblazoned on their black jackets. Then came "Dignity and Compassion," in which a Dafa prisoner was tortured but appeared as a bodhisattva to his sleeping torturer, who was then converted and redeemed; a glowing, gold-lit land above the clouds, dotted with pavilions and deities, appeared on an enormous backdrop screen, from which more bodhisattvas came zipping down. The grand finale featured a backdrop of enormous rotating cosmic wheels in front of which danced Dafa practitioners with such uniformly beatific faces that with

WHITE HOUSE WATCH *With* **DREW FRIEDMAN**



Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, boss of the opposition.

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a few changes of clothing—Red Army uniforms for the men, for example, instead of golden shirts and khaki pants—they could have been a dance troupe in the Cultural Revolution.

So much for our great moment of inclusion. Though some in the audience clapped with wild enthusiasm, many clapped, as did we, with an exchange of incredulous looks. "Political stuff," my father commented with a laugh. For myself, I was trying to remember why in the world we'd gotten my parents tickets to this thing instead of, say, South Pacific.

This particular Chinese New Year's show was, of course, part of a more general phenomenon of minorities coming to occupy stages hitherto unimaginable. The Inauguration, with its rich racial panoply, capped an already momentous period that saw, for example, the staging of Toni Morrison's opera, *Margaret Garner*, in Lincoln Center's New York State Theater in 2007. The event was greeted with such palpable excitement by the many African Americans in the audience that it was impossible not to be moved. And the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics elicited a similar feeling for many Asians and Asian Americans: While I, personally, felt spooked by its exaltation of mass conformity, my mother stood up in front of the television and sang the Chinese national anthem—which, I should say, was hardly typical behavior for her.

I am all for inclusion. At the same time, I do have to wonder if the previously excluded will at times bring more on their coattails than we bargained for. I suspect that, like us, many of the audience members did not realize in advance that their tickets were supporting Falun Gong. (The manager's welcome note in the program does mention that many of the dancers of the troupe are Dafa practitioners, but nothing in its promotional advertising suggested any religious link.) I likewise wonder whether WFAS-NY, which advertised the show heavily, or any of the troupe's many supporters (the thank-you list at the back of the program lists some 44 assemblymen, city councilmen, congressmen, and mayors, including Michael Bloomberg) had any idea what was afoot. My guess is that they simply thought, "nice Chinese dance group," and coughed up their blessing.

Meanwhile, this canny arts group now has three large troupes touring worldwide. There is a breathtaking chutzpah to their approach: As my husband observed, it was the first time he found himself paying to be proselytized. Online reactions to the show range from warnings to "avoid, avoid, avoid" this group to ecstatic claims that everything about the show "comes from heaven" and that it will "save us all." My own reaction, besides amazed outrage, included an increased appreciation of why the mainland Chinese government might be leery of Falun Gong. I am, please note, not in favor of its forcible suppression. This is, however, a most worldly otherworldliness, now successfully tapping the West via the large vein that is American ethnic sentimentality: What can a Chinese arts group be, after all, but sweet poor people who of course need a helping hand? As for what inclusion means to them, well: Is not all the world a platform?

GISH JEN

Gish Jen is the author of the novels Typical American, Mona in the Promised Land, The Love Wife, *and* Who's Irish?, *a book of stories.*

Anchors Away

The strange resilience of the local TV personality.

Despite a presidential election, a financial crisis, and an improbable Phillies victory in the World Series, the biggest story of 2008 in Philadelphia was probably the scandal involving Larry Mendte and Alycia Lane.

As nearly everyone in the eight-county area knows, the saga involved flirtation, jealousy, sabotage, and two of the region's most recognizable faces: Mendte, one-half of a local power couple who rarely used to make the papers for anything other than his occasional charitable efforts; and Lane, a thirtysomething stunner whom the tabloids had already branded as a rising wild child. Mendte's good-guy reputation began to crumble when FBI agents raided his home last year to inspect his computer. With the press following the investigation's every twist, it emerged that Mendte had repeatedly hacked into Lane's e-mail account, possibly leaking its contents to gossip columns. A guilty plea followed, as well as a lawsuit. Mendte admitted to an "improper relationship" and said he'd been driven over the edge by professional jealousy. When he finally appeared in court to offer a chastened apology, the scene scored huge radio and TV coverage, not to mention splashy play in both of the city's daily newspapers.

Mendte and Lane—just plain Larry and Alycia to the folks who chat you up about them in line at the grocery store—are not the sort of Hollywood stars granted first-name status on "Access Hollywood." Nor are they old-money types of the sort chronicled by tabloids in *The Philadelphia Story*. For modern Philadelphians, they're something that might be even more fascinating: local TV personalities. Until their firings, they were co-anchors for Philadelphia's CBS affiliate. And, while their drama may have been particularly riveting, the attention given the pair was hardly unique. The gossip columns of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Philadelphia Daily News* at times resemble a televisual blotter, as reporters duel for tiny scoops about even the lowliest weekend weatherman.

So readers were in the loop when Channel 29's Sue Serio had knee surgery. They knew when her Fox colleague Dorothy Krysiuk missed work for a back injury. Locals learned of a recent nightclub visit by Fox 29's Sharon Crowley, Tasha Jamerson and—presumably recovered from the back troubles—Krysiuk ("must have been ladies' night," mused the *Inquirer*) and a Brasserie Perrier sighting of Channel 6's Nydia Han and Erin O'Hearn (who displayed "a healthy dose of cleavage," according to the *Daily News*). It doesn't matter how prosaic the details are: Both dailies were hot on the story when Channel 10 weatherman Glenn Schwartz had rotator cuff surgery, making it temporarily impossible for him to don his trademark bowties. Locals learned when Channel 10's Jade McCarthy got engaged. And, sure, "Action News" anchor Monica Malpass made the news during her explosive divorce. But readers also knew about it when she filed paperwork to build a new deck for her Rittenhouse Square home, when she adopted a kitten, and when she showed up at a party last year looking "cougarific."

It's not just a Philadelphia obsession. If you live outside Los Angeles, New

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

In the February 18 issue, "Conservatism is Dead" incorrectly identified Bob Dole as the Senate majority leader in 1993. He was minority leader at the time. "Network Nation" also misspelled the name of Erving Goffman. We regret the errors.

ANTHONY RUSSO

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DIVERSITY/NEWSCOM

York, or Washington, your hometown's celebrity roster is probably on television at 6 and 11. As Craig Allen, author of *News is People: The Rise of Local TV News and the Fall of News from New York*, says, "Local news enables every town to be Hollywood."

Once upon a time, residents of non-Hollywood cities had lots of locally famous people to gawk at. There were hometown tycoons and hometown heiresses and hometown department-store bosses, a local elite that might not appear in movies but had a way of popping up in the society pages. In the past few decades, though, local bankers have morphed into regional vice-presidents of banking conglomerates and local industrialists have turned into regional sales managers for diversified multinationals. With the decline of local elites, the market for gossip globalized just as surely as the market for IT support services. Which leaves local gossips with . . . hey, was that NBC 10's Deanna Durante, running through the airport Friday morning? Yes it was! Durante and her fiancé made it to their Southwest gate just in time for a flight to St. Louis, according to the *Daily News*.

This telegenic breed of local notables was created by a man named Albert Primo. When Primo started out in television, local newscasts tended to feature a single stentorian anchor reciting the entire 15 minutes of each day's news. Working at KYW in Philadelphia in 1965, Primo developed "Eyewitness News." "I took the five ugliest guys and made them producers, and I took everyone else . . . and gave them a beat," he says. "I'd put them next to the anchor person, so the public got an eyewitness report from somebody who was on the scene. All of a sudden, people were asking for their autographs." KYW's anchors in 2008: Larry Mendte and Alycia Lane.

Three years later, Primo was brought to WABC in New York, where "Eyewitness News" became a pop-culture phenomenon, making household names of Howard Cosell and Joan Lunden. Before long, the concept had spread around the country. As rival stations embraced similar imitations, they dueled for market share by playing up the personalities of the on-air talent, putting them in 30-second spots and sending them out to various touchy-feely community events.

In a cheeseball 1970s way, winning market share by selling personality prefigured the formula that's seen lone bloggers supplant venerable newspapers. "You are your own identity," says Allen. "That's where all media is headed, and that's where local TV news already is." And so is the consumer. Studies show that local news is far more popular than other news sources: Data from Pew Research Center says 52 percent of Americans regularly watch local TV news, well above the 34 percent who read newspapers or the 29 percent who view network news.

So much for the age of the viral video celebrity. "You get a lot of tips about these people," says Dan Gross, the *Daily News*'s gossip columnist. "In Philadelphia, there aren't that many real celebrities, and a lot of the TV types, they get treated as, 'Oh, wow.' There will be some fancy party or restaurant opening that's portrayed as everyone who's anyone is there. And who that everyone is, is every fucking jerk-off from every TV station."

But will tomorrow's newscasters get the same attention? Lost amid recent reports of shuttered foreign bureaus, spiked book sections, and other highbrow media calamities are intimations that local TV news faces its own troubles. A decade ago, the average late newscast reached 21 percent of people watching television at that time. Today, the number is 12 percent. The Television Bureau of Advertising, an industry trade group, predicts local spot ads will tumble between 4 and 8 percent this year. The age of the million-dollar local anchor has been declared kaput. Longtime observers say the live-shot reporter may be buried next.

Even the biggest stations are tightening their belts, axing expensive veteran anchors and hiring "multimedia reporters," assigned to report, shoot, and blog stories all at once. Typically, concern about such changes has less to do with actual news-gathering—the decline of the local daily, the trusty tip sheet for TV types, hurts a city's news content much more—than with matters of audience affection and market research, which have always been the local-news programmers' biggest concern. In the short run, the economy may actually help the celebrification of even the cut-rate talent stations are hiring. "Because they're not selling commercial spots, what are they filling them with? More promotion for the talent," says Scott Jones, a former news director who runs the industry tip sheet ftvlive.com. "So the anchors are getting even more famous because the local car dealership isn't buying that thirty-second spot." But, in the long run, the locals face the same problem that bedevils their highbrow media rivals: There's simply less revenue to pay the folks they've turned into America's last local celebrities. Coming up next: Your "Eyewitness News" team dies in a fiery economic crash. Film at 11.

Michael Schaffer

Michael Schaffer's book, One Nation Under Dog, will be published in April.

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Yoo Complete Me

The civil libertarian defending the Bush torture theorist.

No former Bush administration official has been more vilified as a torturing monster than John Yoo. And, for years, one of Yoo's most severe critics has been former Clinton Justice official Dawn Johnsen. Last April, Johnsen called Yoo a "rogue legal adviser," declaring that the "shockingly flawed content" of one of his notorious memos justifying torture—along with the "horrific acts it encouraged … all demand our outrage." Her attacks were so fervent, in fact, that *Mother Jones* branded her the "anti-Yoo." Now, in a novelistic turn, the anti-Yoo will be responsible for defending her bête noir. Johnsen has been nominated to head the office where Yoo worked, the Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) in the Justice Department, and one of her main responsibilities will be to decide whether or not to investigate and prosecute Yoo and other Bush officials for their conduct in the war on terrorism.

Conservatives are apoplectic about Johnsen: *The Wall Street Journal* compared her nomination to "naming a conscientious objector as head of the armed forces." Attacking her as "President Gulliver's Lawyer," the *Journal* went on to depict Johnsen as a crusader against executive power, who "seems to think her job isn't to defend the Presidency but to tie it down with even more legal ropes." But the charge is unfair. While many liberals (and perhaps Johnsen herself) might take emotional satisfaction in the prosecution of Yoo, she has made a commitment—at least in the context of torture prosecutions—to protect executive power, a commitment that may, oddly enough, make her one of John Yoo's most important advocates.

Based on Johnsen's impeccable liberal credentials, it's easy to see why conservatives would fear her positions on executive power. After Yale Law School, she worked at the ACLU's Reproductive Freedom Project and then was legal director of NARAL before going on to serve for five years in the Clinton OLC.

But, under Walter Dellinger's leadership, the Clinton OLC was hardly opposed to executive power, and Johnsen embraced the bipartisan traditions of the office, where she succeeded Dellinger as acting head in 1997. She proved her political independence, for example, by denying the Immigration and Naturalization Service's request to waive the oath of allegiance requirement for mentally disabled applicants for citizenship. (Although the waiver was politically popular, Johnsen concluded it violated federal law.) Moreover, she also demonstrated a respect for the practice of signing statements, where the president reserves the right to refuse to enforce laws he believes are unconstitutional. Johnsen has said she advised President Clinton that he had the power to refuse to enforce a provision in a $265 billion military authorization bill requiring the armed forces to discharge HIV-positive members. "Bush's abuses notwithstanding, in relatively rare circumstances, Presidents do have the authority to refuse to comply with statutes," she has written.

Dawn Johnsen, the anti–John Yoo.

In Johnsen's view, signing statements, judiciously deployed, are perfectly defensible—a position that puts her at odds with the American Bar Association, which has condemned the use of signing statements in all circumstances. In her opinion, Bush's error wasn't that he insisted on the president's power to make independent constitutional judgments, but that he failed to explain his constitutional objections in open, transparent ways that Congress and the courts could review and debate. Johnsen criticizes Bush's signing statements for being "so abbreviated and vague that the precise nature of his objections … remained hidden from public scrutiny."

Moving forward, a question that will occupy Johnsen and her colleagues at Justice is whether to prosecute or investigate Yoo's OLC for issuing the torture memos, and what to do about CIA operatives who followed his advice. The issue hinges on whether giving or relying on erroneous legal advice should be a criminal offense. And, in both cases, Johnsen and the Justice Department have made clear that Yoo and those who acted on his advice should not be prosecuted.

Even before Johnsen's confirmation, the Department of Justice has already signaled its intention to defend Bush administration officials who are being sued for their legal advice, upholding the bipartisan principle that erroneous legal advice shouldn't be criminal. The Justice Department has already asked a San Francisco judge to dismiss a lawsuit against Yoo brought by a Yale Law School human rights clinic representing alleged dirty bomber Jose Padilla. As for prosecuting the CIA, human rights groups and Representative John Conyers are pressing the department to expand the mandate of special prosecutor John Durham, who is already investigating whether the CIA acted illegally when it destroyed interrogation videotapes. But the DOJ seems likely to resist these requests, unless specific evidence emerges that the CIA engaged in torture that went beyond the waterboarding whose legality OLC approved.

Johnsen agrees with her new employers that the CIA should not be punished for relying on Yoo's legal advice: "For decades prior to this administration, OLC legal opinions were treated by the executive branch as authoritative unless overruled by the AG or the President," she wrote on the *IntLawGrrls* blog. Therefore it would be "very hard" to say "that it was unreasonable for CIA career employees to rely on what OLC and the White House instructed that the law permitted." In Johnsen's opinion, any investigation should avoid focusing on "the criminal culpability of the career guy who engaged in waterboarding/tor-

MCT/LANDOV (JOHNSEN); ANTHONY RUSSO

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ture in reliance on the horrific legal advice," an approach she called "the wrong way to go."

Johnsen's positions suggest that she would be open to a middle ground about torture prosecutions. She opposes those who demand prosecutions before knowing the facts, as well as those who are ruling out the possibility of prosecutions entirely. "The next AG should investigate what happened" in connection with waterboarding, she has written. "OLC misinterpreted the law in a way that led to torture. No question that demands investigation." Johnsen didn't specify her preferred approach, but one possibility would be to follow Senator Patrick Leahy's suggestion of setting up an investigative commission modeled on the Church Committee, the 1975 congressional investigation into CIA and FBI abuses that led to the passage of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. Properly constrained, a congressional investigative commission could avoid the prosecutorial witch hunt that Obama is determined to avoid. ("If there are clear instances of wrongdoing," he said in his first press conference, "people should be prosecuted just like any ordinary citizen; but, … generally speaking, I'm more interested in looking forward than I am in looking backward.") Witnesses could be granted immunity from prosecution to the degree that they relied in good faith on OLC opinions, leaving open the possibility of prosecution only for freelance torturers. As Johnsen has written, "It is conceivable that such an investigation would uncover facts that could support a prosecution, but that is not true of what we know today."

Johnsen's positions on other questions involving executive power are harder to predict. But all of her writing suggests that Johnsen, no less than her DOJ colleagues, is ready to assure witnesses that they will be staunchly defended by the OLC as long as they relied in good faith on the OLC's advice. That's why Yoo should be relieved, rather than apprehensive, that the OLC will soon be headed by the woman who has declared that his "bogus constitutional arguments for outlandishly expansive presidential power" demand nothing less than "outrage." Although she may not be John Yoo's best friend, she could turn out to be his best defender.

Jeffrey Rosen

The Media Misery Index

Percentage of people who get most of their national and international news from the newspaper in 2008: **35**

Percentage of people who get most of their national and international news from the Internet in 2008: **40**

Percentage of people who got it from the Internet in 2001: **13**

The Pew Research Center for The People & The Press (PEW)

Total daily newspaper circulation in 2000: **55,773,000**

Total daily newspaper circulation in 2007: **50,742,000**

Editor & Publisher International Yearbook

Decline in the Sunday circulation of *The New York Times* in the six months ending on March 31, 2007: **9.3 percent**

Audit Bureau of Circulations

Size of *Newsweek*'s advertising rate base in 2007: **3.1 million**

Projected size of *Newsweek*'s rate base in January 2010: **1.5 million**

The New York Times, 2/8/09

❧

Amount total print ad revenue for newspapers was up in the third quarter of 2000: **4.3 percent**

Amount print ad revenue for newspapers was down in the third quarter of 2006: **2.6 percent**

Amount print ad revenue for newspapers was down in the third quarter of 2007: **9 percent**

Amount print ad revenue for newspapers was down in the third quarter of 2008: **19.26 percent**

Newspaper Association of America

Total newspaper revenue from automotive classifieds in 2003: **$5.2 billion**

Total newspaper revenue from automotive classifieds in 2007: **$3.26 billion**

Newspaper Association of America

Percentage the Dow dropped in 2008: **34 percent**

Percentage the Gannett Company's stock dropped in 2008: **79 percent**

Percentage the New York Times Company stock fell that same year: **62 percent**

The percentage that the New York Times Company stock has fallen since 2002, as of press time: **89 percent**

❧

Percentage of national print journalists who spend half or more of their time producing unique content for their outlet's website: **26 percent**

Percentage of national print journalists who say the website is of equal or greater priority than the print edition at their publication: **41 percent**

PEW and the Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ), 2008

Percentage of ad revenues traditionally provided by total newspaper ads: **33-50 percent**

Erik Sass, MediaDailyNews

Percentage of newspaper profits provided by online ad revenue in the third quarter of 2008: **8.4 percent**

Newspaper Association of America

❧

Number of employees in the newspaper division of Gannett in 2000: **41,000**

Number of employees currently in its newspaper division (roughly): **29,000**

MediaDailyNews

Amount the number of U.S. wire services and newspapers accredited to cover Congress has fallen since the mid-1980s: **72 percent**

PEJ

The number of foreign newspaper correspondents in 2002: **188**

The number of foreign newspaper correspondents in 2006: **141**

The Washington Post

Membership in DC's Regional Reporters Association in 1985, its largest year: **200**

Membership in DC's Regional Reporters Association in 2009: **73**

Regional Reporters Association

Peak number of Washington Bureau staff in the seven surviving Tribune Co. newspapers (includes the *Los Angeles Times*, *Hartford Courant*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Baltimore Sun*, and others), combined: **110**

Current number staff in Washington for those seven papers: **35**

PEJ

Percentage of local print journalists who reported staff cutbacks between 2004 and 2007: **82 percent**

Percentage of national print journalists who reported staff cutbacks between 2004 and 2007: **69 percent**

PEW and PEJ

❧

Percentage of respondents who believed the press "hurt democracy" in 2007: **36 percent**

PEW

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Postcards from the Edge

Ground zero of Israel's new ultra-nationalism.

Adham Jamal, head of the local branch of the fundamentalist Islamic Movement, and Ze'ev Noiman, head of the local branch of the far-right Yisrael Beiteinu ("Israel is Our Home") party, call themselves friends. Both men are deputy mayors of this mixed Arab-Jewish city near Haifa, and their offices are on the same floor of the municipality. "Adham is a great guy," says Noiman, a retired career army officer. "He's condemned terrorism. True, I don't know what he says when he's speaking among Arabs, but to us he says the right things." Jamal: "Ze'ev isn't a racist like Lieberman," referring to Yisrael Beiteinu leader Avigdor Lieberman. "He grew up here in Acre. He lives with us." Both men say they keep disagreements over national issues separate from cooperation on local issues.

Acre has always been an unlikely home for co-existence. Many of its 35,000 Jews are children of immigrants from Arab countries, or recent immigrants from the Asian republics of the former Soviet Union. And many of Acre's 17,000 Arabs are poor and traditionalist. But somehow it's worked. The security guard who checks the bags at the municipality is an Arab—a gesture of trust in the Arab minority I've never seen in Israel. The town's Arab restaurants are filled with Jews. In Sa'id, one of the best hummus restaurants in the country, Jews and Arabs share tables; one recent afternoon there, I ate with a young Bedouin man named Ali, who had volunteered for the Israeli army and was voting for Kadima.

But the balance is becoming increasingly hard for Acre to manage. Last Yom Kippur, hundreds of Arabs and Jews fought in the streets. Jewish store windows were smashed, Arab homes firebombed. The riot was set off by an Arab man who drove into a Jewish neighborhood, violating the unwritten law against traffic in Jewish areas on the fast day. The driver, who Jews say was loudly playing Arabic music, publicly apologized, religious leaders from both communities met for a *sulha*, or peace accord, and Acre tried to return to normal.

The atmosphere of mutual distrust never quite dissipated, however, and now it has been coopted by two extremist parties. In the recent elections, Yisrael Beiteinu, which regards Israel's Arab minority as a fifth column and wants to revoke the citizenship of those who won't take a loyalty oath to the Jewish state, won as many votes in Acre as the more mainstream Likud party, according to local party officials. And a plurality of Acre's Arabs voted for the nationalist Balad, or "Homeland," which rejects a Jewish state and insists Arabs be recognized as a national minority. For Lieberman's supporters, Balad founder Azmi Bishara—who fled Israel after being accused of spying for Hezbollah—embodies Arab treason. One ad by Yisrael Beiteinu declared it's a "shame and disgrace" that former Knesset member Bishara "is still getting a pension of 8,000 shekels a month from the Israeli government."

I've come to Acre because promoting Arab Israeli equality and Arab-Jewish co-existence is my civic passion. I know how hard it is to separate the Arab Israeli issue from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Israel's Arabs are a unique minority: second-class within a Jewish majority, yet part of a regional majority hostile to Israel. But Israel's dilemma is unique as well. To be true to itself, Israel must remain a Jewish state responsible for Jews around the world, and a democratic state responsible for all its citizens, Jews and non-Jews.

What's breaking down in Acre is the habit of decency that makes these insoluble paradoxes possible. Acre offers a scenario for the unraveling of Israeli society. Between Lieberman and Bishara there can be no shared identity. If Yisrael Beiteinu and Balad are our future, then Lieberman is right: The greatest threat to Israel's existence comes from within.

Acre's walled Old City, one of the country's leading tourist sites, has an Arab market, an ancient port, and a vast underground Crusader-era fortress of tunnels and vaulted hallways. Acre was the last capital of the Crusaders before they were expelled from the Holy Land. And that past intrudes on Acre's politics. Jews say Arabs see them as Crusaders, conquerors who will one day be expelled. "They say it half-jokingly," says Yisrael Beiteinu's Noiman, "but it isn't a joke."

I have the fate of the Crusaders in mind when I visit the headquarters of Balad, a one-room storefront at the edge of the Old City, facing Ottoman walls built against the sea. "National identity and full citizenship," reads the Arabic banner hanging out front. The citizenship is Israeli, but the national identity is Palestinian.

Balad's posters and leaflets are only in Arabic; unlike Hadash, the mostly Arab Communist Party, Balad doesn't even bother trying to appeal to Jews. On the wall is a large framed photograph of Gamal Abdel Nasser, the late Egyptian leader revered here for his pan-Arabism. Beside it hangs a poster warning young Arabs against doing alternative national service—"a step toward military service."

I ask Maryam Wishahie, an English teacher and a Balad ac-

Acre, once a stronghold for Crusaders, now a stronghold for Israeli extremist Avigdor Lieberman.

ROGER VIOLLET COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES

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tivist, whether she thinks the Jews will end up being expelled like the Crusaders. "That depends on Israel's behavior," she says. "The Crusaders surrounded themselves with forts, just like Israel's security wall. If Israel doesn't become part of this region, it will have no future."

The more immediate possibility, she fears, is that her Jewish neighbors will build a wall around Arab neighborhoods, or try to force Acre's Arabs out. "The house next door to mine was recently bought by a Jew. I'm used to seeing the other: In my apartment building there are Muslims and Christians and a Jewish-owned restaurant. But this was done through an organization that wants to settle Jews in the Old City. What is this, the West Bank?"

For me, I say, the presence of Arab citizens in a Jewish state is an opportunity. You're the only part of the Middle East I can still talk to.

"We're not a bridge," she counters. "A bridge means that you belong to both sides. We are Palestinians. But if Israel will make real efforts for peace, we can help draw hearts together."

For Balad, peace can only happen when Israel abandons its Jewish identity—and its Jewish majority. "There is no solution between Zionism and Palestinian nationalism," says Maryam.

The Acre headquarters for Yisrael Beiteinu is a ten-minute walk from the Old City, and it is located in the Histadrut labor union building, once a bastion of the left. A group of young activists sit at a recruiting booth outside. They are all secular; one young man has a ponytail, a young woman multiple piercings. Posters taped to the booth show Lieberman's brooding bearded face, and the words, "Lieberman, i believe him."

As the leading parties blur into each other, and peace and security become more elusive, Lieberman promises clarity. He breaks the rules, not only of civility but of Israel's political categories. He combines left and right in a brutal pragmatism that speaks to a post-ideological generation. Lieberman is the only right-wing leader to support a Palestinian state. And he goes farther than the left in his willingness to concede territory, though for right-wing reasons: He wants to withdraw from areas within pre-1967 Israel that are overwhelmingly Arab, to reduce the number of Israel's Arab citizens—to eliminate the internal enemy.

Lieberman's young activists are eager to talk.

Itamar: "They say they're discriminated against? I'm discriminated against. I have to do three years in the army; they don't. Okay, I don't want them in the army. But what about national service? When I get out of the army at twenty-one, an Arab young man is already a lawyer. I want them to contribute. Also the ultra-Orthodox."

But whenever you target a specific group, I say, you're on a dangerous road. Lieberman doesn't target the ultra-Orthodox for avoiding military service, just the Arabs.

"It's not like that," says Itamar. "This is a life and death issue for the state. The ultra-Orthodox don't call for the destruction of Israel. In another twenty years, we will lose this country if something isn't done."

Yotam: "We're not motivated by hatred, but by love for our country. From the moment this state was born, the Arabs have tried to destroy us."

Chen: "A minority anywhere has to respect the country."

Yossi: "I see my future here in Acre with a Jewish majority, and with Arabs who respect the country. They want to be Palestinian? Then go to Palestine. This is the state of Israel."

Yotam: "This party [Yisrael Beiteinu] is my hope for staying in Acre."

Yael: "For staying in the country."

A car loudly playing Arab music drives by.

"You'll see," says Yael, "he'll come back."

He does. Twice.

Yossi Klein Halevi

Small Change

Dick Cheney has—surprise!—a paranoid view of Obama's war on terrorism.

Dick Cheney is never known for his good cheer, but, when *Politico* interviewed him recently, he sounded especially dour on the subject of Barack Obama's intentions vis-à-vis counterterrorism. In what seemed like a direct slap at the new president, Cheney warned that national security is "a tough, mean, dirty, nasty business . . . and we're not going to win this fight by turning the other cheek."

While Cheney didn't come out and say so, he sounded pretty convinced that Obama was planning a civil-liberties bender. And, based on Obama's inaugural address ("we reject as false the choice between our safety and our ideals") and his initial executive orders on Guantánamo, interrogations, and CIA secret prisons, it certainly did seem like the new president was initiating a major departure from the tough, mean, dirty, nasty policies of recent years. Since 1995, when the CIA began a special rendition program to snatch Al Qaeda operatives off the street and bring them to America or another country for interrogation and prosecution, the powers of the U.S. intelligence community have expanded exponentially. Obama's decisions to close Gitmo and proscribe torture marked the first time since 1995 that a U.S. president had voluntarily relinquished power in the war against Al Qaeda. Moreover, Obama's largely unnoticed presidential memorandum on the Freedom of Information Act—which reestablished an older, more permissive standard for the release of documents—appeared to tip the balance between liberty and security even further in liberty's direction.

Yet, despite these developments, the first few weeks of Obama's presidency have also offered hints that the new president is leaving himself wiggle room on fighting terrorism. While his initial executive orders did represent real advances for civil libertarians, there are a growing number of reasons to suspect that Obama will not be quite as liberal on these matters as his rhetoric might have suggested, his supporters might have hoped, or Dick Cheney might have feared.

Take, for example, the 243 prisoners at Gitmo. Obama may have ordered the base shut and suspended all military tribunals there—but that doesn't mean that all the prisoners are necessarily going to end up in civilian courts. "They're either going to be moved and tried in American courts, tried in military courts, or they're going to be sent back to their countries," Vice President Joe Biden told CBS on January 25. More recently, incoming CIA director Leon Panetta said in his confirmation hearing that a cabinet-level review of the cases will determine "what prisoners can be tried, what prisoners can be transferred, what do you do with those prisoners who can neither be tried or transferred for some reason and what will happen with them."

On torture, Obama began his administration by saying that the United States would only use interrogation techniques found in the Army Field Manual, a document that is in line with the Geneva conventions. But this week, in announcing his plans to vote to confirm Panetta, Republican Senator Kit Bond said that he was supporting the nominee in part because he had "committed to . . . exploring

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the use of enhanced interrogation techniques on high-value detainees that may warrant going beyond the Army Field Manual in certain situations."

As for rendition, the controversial practice of kidnapping terrorist suspects on foreign soil and frequently sending them to other countries, Obama shut down permanent CIA secret prisons known as black sites, where Al Qaeda leaders were often held after being captured. But he is leaving open what one of his executive orders called "facilities used only to hold people on a short-term, transitory basis." The option for temporary detention strongly suggests that Obama's CIA will still practice some form of rendition. When asked about this at his confirmation hearing, Panetta said that terrorist suspects would not be picked up off the streets at random and sent to foreign dungeons for the purpose of being tortured. But he also said, "Renditions where we return an individual to the jurisdiction of another country, and then they exercise their right to try that individual and to prosecute him under their laws—I think that is an appropriate use of rendition."

Indeed, a senior White House legal adviser tells me, "There have been no changes to rendition policy, except to the extent that renditions would render people to places where they would be treated humanely." Jeffrey Smith, a former CIA general counsel who has been consulted by the new administration on these issues, says the change on rendition "is not a seismic shift in policy." He adds, "Rather, it is that the United States will send individuals to other states, and, if those states have a questionable record on human rights, then we will not only seek assurances as we have in the past, but that we will be more rigorous on following up on those assurances." In all likelihood, this means that we will still send prisoners to jails in Egypt and Jordan. Of course, doing more to ensure that rendered suspects are not tortured in those countries would represent a small measure of progress as far as human rights advocates are concerned. But it's hardly the sweeping change many were hoping for.

Finally, Obama's Justice Department appears to be continuing the Bush administration's practice of urging domestic courts to throw out civilian cases involving rendition and torture allegations. That, at least, is what happened on February 9, when the department told the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals that a lawsuit on behalf of Guantánamo detainee Binyam Mohammed would disclose state secrets and should therefore be dismissed. Mohammed, a British resident, was captured after September 11, then allegedly sent to a Moroccan jail. He ended up in Gitmo, where charges against him were eventually dropped.

Caroline Fredrickson, the ACLU's Washington legislative director, said the decision to invoke state secrets in the Mohammed case was "deeply disappointing." The organization this week pressed allies in the House and Senate to introduce bills to limit the use of the state-secrets privilege in court. It signals in some ways the end of Obama's civil-liberties honeymoon. *Eli Lake*

Eli Lake is a national-security correspondent for The Washington Times.

The Morgue

A reporter's elegy for his dying paper.

My relationship with my *Los Angeles Times* subscription is extremely contentious. Three times in the past six months, I have called up and cancelled the paper (you get an operator in Manila—much of the old circulation department has been outsourced), only to reconsider a few days later and restart my subscription.

When I don't take the *Times*, I feel guilty. I worked there for eight years. I still contribute pieces regularly. It's my hometown paper. But then I get the paper, read it, and start the day angry. There's nothing in the paper that enrages me. The articles are professionally done. No, my rage is from what I don't see, all the stories that aren't there any longer.

This is the daily tragedy of all the layoffs and buyouts and departures at U.S. newspapers and magazines. You can count up the journalists who have left the profession and are out of work, but much of the carnage of the ongoing media industry can't be measured or seen: corruption undiscovered, events not witnessed, tips about problems that never reach anyone's ears because those ears have left the newsroom. With fewer watchdogs, you get less barking. How can we know what we'll never know?

What stories are we missing? I can answer that question only for myself, thinking of my life with my hometown paper.

Gone is the stuff my neighbors and relatives read, the straightforward news about their local communities, particularly in the suburban counties that ring Los Angeles, a county of ten million people and 88 cities. A decade ago, the *Times* fielded more than a dozen reporters in the some of the county's larger cities. Dozens more toiled in the big, growing areas that border L.A.—Ventura, Riverside, San Bernardino, Orange. Yes, those writers were young and green. Yes, they missed things, as inexperienced reporters do. But they were there. They watched council meetings and school board meetings and county supervisors meetings. They called the cops. They looked at court filings. The most ambitious dug deeply into problems of transportation and development.

But those places were among the first to face cuts, even before the Tribune Company took over the paper in 2000. Where dozens of reporters once worked, only small skeleton crews remain. There are fewer checks. Fewer meetings are witnessed. Fewer records are reviewed.

It's not just the small and the routine that have been lost. I think of my *Times* ending, in the Washington bureau last spring, which at the time had more than 30 reporters, including a dedicated investigative team, and a full cadre of reporters covering all the big issues (immigration, labor, economics, health, etc.). Now the policy reporters and investigators are nearly all gone. Only a dozen reporters remain, and the paper no longer has its own Washington bureau (there's a combined Washington office for all the Tribune newspapers). Among the departed are *Times* reporters who first reported the identity (and suicide) of the anthrax suspect, uncovered corruption in contracting in Iraq, discovered several ways in which relatives of members of Congress were profiting from their political connections, and broke the initial stories that led to the federal investigation and downfall of Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska.

I think of my *Times* middle years, when I commuted between L.A. and Sacramento to cover a movie-star governor. The Capitol bureau was so full it was hard to find an empty desk. I'd confer with the bureau chief, who constantly dispensed solid news tips and sniffed out corruption. (She'd personally ended the career of a state insurance commissioner who appeared to be on his way to bigger things.) I'd pick the brains of the reporter who covered California's criminally overcrowded prisons and the legislative reporter who would expose an Assembly speaker's habit of using campaign funds to live the high life. I'd spend hours reporting stories with my two colleagues on the Arnold beat. But it's four years later, and all those colleagues have taken buyouts or departed for other gigs. In fact, I can think of only a handful of re-

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porters who have produced major investigative or narrative work in the *Times* in the past ten years and remain.

To be sure, some of these journalists continue to work in other media organizations, at non-profits, or in academia. Local papers cover the smaller cities and suburban counties of Southern California, and there's fine coverage of Washington in the *Post* and Sacramento in the *Bee*. And, even when newspapers were flush, on many big stories—Iraq, sub-prime mortgages—our watchdogs in the press either didn't bark or barked too late.

But none of that replaces what's been lost. I think of my last seat in the *Times*' main Los Angeles newsroom, a slice of fraying carpet and old newspapers extending a city block between 1st and 2nd Streets downtown. I had a desk on the south side of metro, a bit of newsroom real estate that was fabulously remote—out of sight of the editors on the desk. It was still metro, but far enough away that it felt like another country. We called the place Baja Metro.

My desk was one of a half-dozen pushed together. By the time I arrived in 2006, after a book leave and with a new beat—labor—two of the six desks were vacant. The down-cycle of buyouts and layoffs was already under way.

Newspapers are being replaced, it's often said, but how could you replace my three Baja Metro neighbors? Connie Kang, to my left, was the rare reporter who spoke Korean, and she produced stories from that community that no one else in the room could have attempted. Greg Krikorian, sitting directly across from me, had the courthouses and law-enforcement agencies wired, and he reported powerfully and skeptically on terrorism prosecutions.

In the desk to my right, Henry Weinstein, the legal-affairs reporter, had a base of sources that he'd built over 30 years. He wrote crisp dailies about court decisions while digging out deeper stories all over the state and country—about backlogs in processing DNA samples, a federal judge who was abusing his power, a Texas defense lawyer who slept during a murder case. When I mentioned that a high-ranking appellate judge had a role in a story I was pursuing, Henry gave me his cell phone number. The judge balked at my first couple questions before I mentioned that Henry had told me to call him. The judge then talked my ear off.

Henry is gone, of course. So are my other Baja neighbors. Those left behind in the newsroom have more breaking news to handle, and less time to follow their noses. I felt this dynamic myself, a nagging sense that my work was having less impact, that I was slipping. Last spring, while I was covering the presidential campaign, another opportunity opened up, and I took it.

Today's *Times* carries plenty of fine news stories: about the federal stimulus package, the state budget mess, local crime, the octuplets born in Bellflower, a couple business features, and the Oscars. But there are few stories that show deep digging, that took more than a couple days to put together. And there's other news. The *Times* has announced it will no longer publish a Metro section. The local news will be pushed into other parts of the paper. Management has begun yet another round of buyouts and layoffs—70 people in editorial alone. Each departure means we'll know less.

I can't live without my hometown paper, but I hate living with it. I look at the phone, and wonder if it's time again to call Manila.

JOE MATHEWS

Joe Mathews is an Irvine senior fellow at the New America Foundation.

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East of Port Huron, Michigan, across the St. Clair River, Sarnia smokestacks heat the sky on a frigid day in January. Photo by Joseph Heroun

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The Cool Presidency

An inquiry into Obama's hipness.

MICHELLE COTTLE

If one were to gather together a dozen of our society's key arbiters of cool—ad execs, movie stars, fashion designers, music critics, pollsters, suburban tweens—and instruct them to generate the profile of a "cool" politician, what are the odds that their efforts would result in a gangly, jug-eared, overeducated, workaholic with a fondness for Scrabble? Not to denigrate our freshly minted president, but, when you tick through some of the basics, Barack Obama comes across as an inveterate dork. It's not just that the guy is a double-Ivied academic; he is painfully wonky with hard-core professorial tendencies. If what we've witnessed thus far of his dancing is any indication, he is somewhat rhythmically challenged. His favorite book is *Moby-Dick*. His favorite TV program growing up was "MASH," though "The Dick Van Dyke Show" was right up there. He has read at least six Harry Potter tomes. Perhaps most damning, he is a collector of comics—Spider-Man and Conan the Barbarian—a tidbit that prompted the editor-in-chief of *Marvel* to publicly enthuse: "This has got to be the coolest thing on Planet Earth for us. The commander-in-chief is actually a nerd-in-chief."

And yet, somehow, this nerd-in-chief has ascended to a level of global cool uninhabited by any of his political forebears. The opening spread of a recent *Entertainment Weekly* cover story, titled "President Rock Star," neatly summarized the situation: "He's bigger than Brangelina, bigger than Beyonce: See how our new president has become the biggest celebrity in the world." Indeed, the entire First Family has transfixed the popular culture: How about that four-year-old footage "Entertainment Tonight" obtained of Sasha and Malia? Or the *Us Weekly* cover of Michelle and Barack? (Not to be confused with the one of Barack and the girls.) At this point, the conversation has moved beyond whether Obama himself possesses that special magic—when "Saturday Night Live" constructs a skit around your chronic coolness, the conventional wisdom is pretty much set—to how expansive his cool coattails will prove. Post-election, there has been contemplation of such questions as whether Obama can make public service cool (possibly), whether he can redefine cool in a way that will be uplifting for young black men (God willing), and whether he can make Washington cool (fat chance).

But, when an individual is propelled to supernova status at such astonishing speed, there are a couple of even more basic questions to consider: How did this happen? Where did this man's cool come from? And what can its roots tell us about how Obama will lead?

Glancing back over the president's life, you notice that he is a latecomer to cool. Far from growing up a smooth, charismatic, or cocky alpha male, "Barry" Obama spent much of his youth conflicted about his mixed-race heritage, confused about where he fit in, and insecure about who he was. In high school and college, he dabbled with some of cool's commonplace talismans—alcohol, cigarettes, drugs—as well as a few more culturally charged ones. In *Dreams from My Father*, Obama details his search for self, in part a struggle with racial identity and in part a more generic flirtation with angst and disaffection:

> To avoid being mistaken for a sellout, I chose my friends carefully. The more politically active black students. The foreign students. The Chicanos. The Marxist professors and structural feminists and punk-rock performance poets. We smoked cigarettes and wore leather jackets. At night, in the dorms, we discussed neocolonialism, Franz Fanon, Eurocentrism, and patriarchy. When we ground out our cigarettes in the hallway carpet or set our stereos so loud that the walls began to shake, we were resisting bourgeois society's stifling constraints. We weren't indifferent or careless or insecure. We were alienated.

Ultimately, Obama discarded this model of self. He changed his name from Barry to Barack and traveled from the projects of South Chicago to the villages of Western Kenya in pursuit of a more fulfilling identity. He emerged from this quest with a mellower vibe characterized by easy smiles and a thoughtful, unflappable demeanor. Barry fretted about being cool and therefore wasn't; Barack knew who he was and therefore didn't have to try to be anything. This is the cornerstone of a classic, old-school kind of cool—one based on confidence, nonchalance, and the ability to radiate that you are far too cool to care if others recognize your coolness.

This last quality is a key reason why cool is such a rare commodity in politics. The very nature of the game compels its practitioners to be petitioners, ever bowing and scraping for votes, legislative support, and money. And it is hard to be cool when you are constantly begging. Consider the field's premier pre-Obama phenom of recent times, Bill Clinton. Clinton too was a rock star, a legendary charmer with formidable gifts of persuasion who, through the power and profile of high office, achieved an impressive level of charisma. But Bill was never cool. Despite (or because of) all the sax-playing, underwear chatter, and schmoozing with Hollywood celebs, our forty-second president was too emotive, too eager, too *needy*. Part of what made him such a devastating retail politician was the sense, telegraphed with every broad grin and elbow clasp, that Clinton craved our love and approval. Similarly, no matter how famous he became, he always presented himself as the star-struck kid from Arkansas who could not believe his great fortune to be mingling with the likes of Barbra Streisand and David Geffen. It was charming. But it was deeply uncool.

Obama, by contrast, displays no such awe or hunger, even when hobnobbing with the shiniest A-listers (Jay-Z, George Clooney, Oprah). Whether it's Scarlett Johansson's gushing support being waved away by Candidate Obama or Beyoncé getting weepy at the Neighborhood Ball over the sheer awesomeness of President Obama, the upper hand rests always with the gangly guy with jug ears. As Obama assured *Us*

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Weekly last February, "I don't really get starstruck."

Far more vitally, Obama convinced millions of regular Americans that supporting him was all about fulfilling *our* needs, not his. (He also wisely rejected inquiries into his underwear preference.) Now, as he transitions to governing, Obama is aiming to communicate something similar: Fighting for his policies isn't about proving he's right or flexing his political muscle; it's about serving the public. When others don't share his urgency to get "the people's business" done, Obama might show some teeth, as he did at a February 5 speech hawking his stimulus package. (The brow furrowed, the finger wagged, the voice hardened, and there were mocking jabs at Republicans: "Then you get the argument, 'Well, this is not a stimulus bill. This is a *spending* bill.'" Pause. Look of total exasperation. "What do you think a stimulus *is*?!") But his is a controlled fire, one that seeks to convey that he does not take the battle personally—that it isn't, ultimately, about him. At a January stimulus meeting with Hill Republicans, the president sanguinely assured those assembled that he knew many of them would beat him up over the bill: "I understand that, and I will watch you on Fox News and feel bad about myself." With that bit of low-key sarcasm, Obama let everyone in the room—and beyond—know that he wouldn't feel bad about himself for one minute. Whatever partisan barbs fly his way, the president intends to remain cool.

It is fitting that much of Barry's journey toward Barack focused on questions of race, because much of Obama's cool has to do with color. Biracial heritage aside, Obama is a black man. And, in this country, black men have long had the edge on cool. As *The Washington Post*'s Donna Britt noted in her December 2006 contribution to the paper's "Being a Black Man" series, "there's cool—and then there's *brothercool*. . . . No other group's identity is as steeped in the *necessity* of appearing cool, or in the expectation that they instinctively bring coolness to the table." The phenomenon goes beyond the concrete trappings of black culture: the music, the style, the vernacular, the gestures. (Fist bump, anyone?) There is a broader, less tangible aura that black men have long possessed (and that white guys, from Elvis Presley to hip-hop-obsessed suburban teens, have long imitated). And, for all the early-campaign debate about whether Obama was "black enough," he channels some of the basic elements of brothercool. He's got the walk. (The swagger is subtle, but it's there.) He's got the talk (more about cadence than lingo—though he has a touch of that too). And, of course, he oozes that fluid self-assurance. ("Confidence is cool's most essential element," Britt observes. "Perhaps that's why black men—for whom the appearance of assurance can be a matter of

David Cowles

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life or death—so often radiate it.") When *Ebony* magazine declared Obama one of "The 25 Coolest Brothers of All Time," he joined the exalted ranks of legends such as Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, Tupac, and Michael Jordan. Obama clearly revels in his brothercool image and, just as clearly, recognizes its political appeal. At public events, he has demonstrated his ease with the fist bump, the shoulder brush, and the occasional bit of slang. "We straight," he told a D.C. waitress when settling a recent bill.

Black men, to be sure, do not have a monopoly on cool. But, just as a thought exercise, imagine Obama as a white politician. Wonky, overeducated, idealistic, unflappable, reform-minded, big into basketball, articulate but without the lyrical echoes of the African American pulpit—far from being brothercool, Obama would be ex-senator turned failed presidential candidate Bill Bradley.

Also fueling Obama's cool is the snap, crackle, and pop of youth—particularly noticeable in a field dominated by starchy gray-hairs. The new president may be a middle-aged wonk, but we are frequently reminded that he stays in sync with the younger generation. For starters, there is his endlessly discussed fitness and sports obsession, with an emphasis on hoops—a hip, urban, young man's game if ever there was one. (*So* much cooler than golf or tennis or even football.) Since the early primary days, we have been treated to a steady stream of stories about the candidate's workouts, pickup games, and scrimmages. (Now and again, he even played with reporters.) The cover of next month's *Men's Journal* proclaims Obama "jock-in-chief" and promises an insider look at "his moves, his trash talk, & his weekly power basketball game."

As for his pop-cult cred, we have been told repeatedly that *The Godfather* I and II (but *definitely* not III) are Obama's top movie picks of all time. His favorite TV show of recent years was HBO's gritty, Baltimore-based epic "The Wire," on which his favorite character was a stickup man named Omar, who made his living ripping off local drug lords. And how many times have we heard that hip-hop mogul Jay-Z is on Obama's iPod? This tidbit is an especially valuable twofer, emphasizing both the president's familiarity with a musical genre anathema to most pols and his love of tech toys. Speaking of tech savvy, Obama has made much of his BlackBerry addiction, and his pioneering Facebook page was but one piece of the social-networking machine credited with mobilizing young voters. It didn't hurt, of course, that Team Obama tapped Chris Hughes, the 25-year-old co-founder of Facebook, to help run its online outreach.

Which brings us to Obama's posse of young 'uns—most notably his chief scribe, 27-year-old Jon Favreau; 24-year-old Eugene Kang, special assistant to the president; and 27-year-old Reggie Love, who, in addition to hovering at Obama's elbow as his "body man," also serves as his morning workout partner and preferred hoops mate. This is not to suggest that Obama favors certain staffers with an eye toward burnishing his image. He is clearly drawn to young people by their energy and idealism—and by his own desire not to feel like a fuddy-duddy. But there can be little doubt that inviting Favreau, Kang, and Love into his inner circle has helped to augment his cool. Press coverage of Favreau (including a spread in *The New York Times* Sunday Styles section) invariably draws attention to youthful quirks such as his preference for working at Starbucks, his tendency to prank e-mail fellow staffers, and his love of the video game "Rock Band." Even Favreau's worst moment—the Facebook party pic showing him groping a cardboard cutout of Hillary Clinton—had a frat-like quality that served to remind everyone just how young he is. Kang, who periodically pops up in pics with Obama—chatting on the plane, golfing in Hawaii—is now so tight with the president that he's referred to as "Reggie Jr." In *The New York Times Magazine*'s January photo survey of "Obama's People," Kang, dewy-faced and with a long gray scarf swallowing his slight frame, looked to have stepped straight out of a Banana Republic ad.

And what is there left to say about Love? A former basketball and football player for Duke who was signed (then cut) by both the Green Bay Packers and the Dallas Cowboys, Obama's hunky personal aide has developed his own cult following. *People* magazine named Love one of the most eligible bachelors of 2008, *Vanity Fair* included him on its "In" list, and ESPN did a mini-documentary on him titled "Chief of Stuff." Obama himself started cracking jokes on the trail about having an aide so much "cooler than the candidate."

But as Obama is surely aware, hanging with Love only boosts his own cool quotient. Every story about Obama banging in the paint alongside Love—not to mention some of Love's pals and former teammates, at least one of whom is now in the NBA—is a feather in the 47-year-old president's virility cap. Shrewdly, Team Obama has been liberal with its media access to Love. In multiple profiles of the infamously hip body man (he received A-1 treatment in the *Times*), we have learned, among other things, about Love's romantic preferences (a basic knowledge of sports is required), his late-night socializing (on the trail, he was the guy everyone wanted to party with), his tattoo ("MY WORD, MY BOND, MY BOYZ, MY BLOOD"), his enduring affinity for beer pong, and, of course, his role in helping his boss keep up with the hip kids. (It was Love who introduced Obama to the fist bump, Love who gave Obama an iPod for his forty-sixth birthday, and Love who loaded said iPod with Jay-Z and Lil Wayne.)

With a quality as elusive as cool, there is the temptation to assume that it must come naturally—that it cannot be forced or forged. But the dirty little secret of our new president's cool is that no element of it came with ease. Obama achieved his laid-back, too-cool-to-care persona by being a committed grind: He spent years working through his insecurities, learning to control his emotions, and sanding down the rough edges of his personality. Even figuring out whether and how to fully embrace his identity as a black man required effort. As a politician, Obama has taken the cultivation still further, with his cultural savvy and band of young *compadres*. He is Jay Gatsby minus the criminal history—an unpolished youth who constructed a smoother, more glittering version of himself out of sweat, vision, and force of will.

In that sense, the key attribute that enabled Obama to become cool—his meticulous resolve—is the same one that also makes him kind of a dork. This should provide some measure of comfort to those who now and again wonder whether Obama is in fact too cool to lead, whether his steady reserve signals a chilly detachment from the problems facing the country. His calm charisma may put Obama on the cover of *People*—but it is still his striving that defines him, and will likely define his administration as well. The upshot is that wonks and intellectuals and other assorted Type-A obsessives across the country can rest easy: Having elected the coolest president in recent memory, we are almost certainly going to get four years of government by nerd. ◆

ANTHONY RUSSO

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Hillary's State

Huge expectations, big egos, turf wars: Is Clinton's State Department just like her campaign?

MICHAEL CROWLEY

AP Photo/Charles Dharapak (Mitchell); Gary Fabiano/SIPA Press/Newscom (Clinton); AP Photo/Dima Gavrysh (Holbrooke)

The seventh floor of the U.S. State Department is a generally dreary place. Its employees roam hallways so long and confusing that they are color-coded for guidance. Fluorescent lights throw down a harsh hospital glare. But, to most State employees, the "real" seventh floor is a secure area, protected by armed guards and doors that require electronic keys, where the department's top staffers, including the secretary herself, spend their days. There, Hillary Clinton works from a gently lit, wood-paneled office adorned with portraits of her predecessors.

Another nearby office will be nearly as important: that of her soon-to-be chief of staff, Cheryl Mills. A dogged former White House lawyer and close Hillary confidante, Mills proved her fealty to the Clintons with a fiery 1999 House floor speech during Bill Clinton's impeachment trial in which she hailed the president's compassion for African Americans like herself. In the late months of Hillary's 2008 bid for the White House, Mills quietly emerged as de facto campaign manager. "Cheryl is extraordinarily loyal to both Clintons," says a former campaign aide. She also has little time for anyone she thinks isn't serving the Clintons well. "She has a very *direct* personality," says the aide.

What she doesn't have is foreign policy experience—a reminder of how alien Hillary's hard-edged political machine is to the diplomatic realm of the State Department. That has some career State-watchers bracing for a culture clash, especially given that Mills is just one of several key members of Hillary's inner circle, or "Hillaryland," making the transition to Foggy Bottom. They include her longtime personal aide, Huma Abedin (now described as a "senior adviser"); her Senate press secretary, Philippe Reines; longtime speechwriter Lissa Muscatine; foreign policy adviser Andrew Shapiro; and scheduler Lona Valmoro. Even Hillary's close friend Maggie Williams, who joined her struggling presidential campaign in January of last year as a senior aide, has been vetting job applicants in recent weeks. To some, this influx echoes the Hindenburg disaster of Hillary's run for president, with its clashing egos, awful management, and endless tawdry leaks. "Given the way the campaign wound up, I think the question mark hanging over her head is whether the department will fall prey to the kinds of feuds and organizational paralysis that plagued the campaign," says the former campaign aide.

Considering the outsized personalities who have already joined Obama's diplomatic corps, this fear seems well-grounded. But Hillary has another, often-forgotten *modus operandi* on which she can fall back—that of her audacious 2000 run for Senate and her subsequent tenure on Capitol Hill, where her hard work and collegiality won near-unanimous accolades and endeared her to a skeptical institution. The question—not only for Hillary's legacy but for U.S. foreign policy—is which of these models she will bring to the seventh floor.

In theory, the secretary of state is a commanding figure uniquely situated to shape world events. The dynamic of the job, however, is often less like a Kissingerian chessboard and more like a game of Whack-a-Mole, in which the department struggles just to manage the crises of the day. Hillary Clinton lacks the lengthy foreign policy resumé of secretaries like Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell, and Madeleine Albright—who spent their pre–State Department lives focused on world

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affairs—but, like each of them, she is clearly lured by the possibility of proactively shaping U.S. foreign policy rather than frantically rushing from continent to continent wielding a diplomatic fire extinguisher.

That's why, well before she was sworn in, Hillary arranged to effectively outsource the immediate work on hotspots like the Middle East and Central Asia. In unpublished portions of a recent interview with *The New York Times*, released in full by the State Department, Clinton recounted telling Obama in "the very first conversation that I can recall" about the State Department job that she wanted to get "immediately moving on someone for the Middle East and someone for Afghanistan and Pakistan." That ultimately resulted in last month's appointments of George Mitchell and Richard Holbrooke as special envoys to those regions. The Obama-Clinton team is also expected to designate former Middle East negotiator Dennis Ross for a similar role focused on Iran.

To some extent, this move has the virtue of necessity. "The idea that she can do all this by herself" is absurd anyway, argues a former top State Department official. But subcontracting the hotspots is about more than lightening Clinton's workload. It also enables Hillary to pick issues of her own, ones where she can take the initiative rather than constantly react to, say, the latest Taliban offensive or rocket attack from Gaza. "You don't want the secretary to have to get down and do the nitty-gritty, get bogged down in the details," says Jim Steinberg, Clinton's State Department deputy. This way, "she doesn't become such a prisoner of the crisis of the moment that she can't advance a long-term agenda." Steinberg said he had just emerged from a meeting with Clinton precisely along these lines. Outsiders agree that Hillary will be looking for a grand mission. "She needs to find a signature," argues one former senior State official from her husband's administration. "What this does is free Secretary Clinton up to deal with the issues that we have completely neglected," adds Nina Hachigian, a former aide on Bill Clinton's National Security Council now with the Center for American Progress.

Topping that list, says Hachigian, is America's relationship with Asia—which happens to be the first region Clinton chose to visit as secretary. Clinton has also complained publicly about the sway the Bush administration gave the Treasury Department to negotiate with China and Japan over currency and trade issues, and wants to reassert State's primacy. And she is certainly familiar with China. The foreign policy highlight of her White House years was a defiant 1995 speech on women's rights she delivered at an international conference in Beijing that targeted, among other things, the Chinese practice of killing baby girls.

Meanwhile, Steinberg, a Harvard and Yale Law School graduate who served as her husband's deputy national security adviser, worked extensively on U.S.-China relations during the Clinton presidency (and even has two adopted daughters from China). Her new assistant secretary for East Asia and Pacific affairs is expected to be Democratic foreign policy heavyweight Kurt Campbell, whose long resumé underscores the post's importance, and who recently co-authored a book with Steinberg. And the head of the department's Office of Policy Planning—a kind of in-house think tank designed for the long view—is Princeton professor Anne-Marie Slaughter, who spent a year's sabbatical based in Shanghai and touring through Asia. Last May, Slaughter told *Newsweek* that "the biggest overall challenge [facing the United States] is managing the rise of Asia."

Hillary's big-think could extend beyond the regional to the global. Strobe Talbott, a longtime Clinton friend and former number-two at State, predicts an unprecedented focus on development programs. One of Hillary's pet causes as First Lady, after all, was pushing so-called "micro-loans" for Third World entrepreneurs. "Think of her slogan for the world being a variation on *It Takes a Village*," Talbott says. "Every time she says 'diplomacy,' she says '*and* development.'" Talbott says Hillary is likely to elevate the oft-neglected posts of undersecretary for democracy and global affairs and undersecretary for economic affairs (which will be filled by economist Lael Brainard—who, illustrating the incestuous world of foreign policy mandarins, is Campbell's wife). "She has given a lot of thought to those two in particular," Talbott says, adding that Clinton will push for a new State focus on "sustainable development, global public health, the environment, and empowerment of women," a far cry from crisis management.

Subcontracting crises to focus on long-term strategy has considerable appeal. But it also brings real risks. The number of outsized personalities within the State Department, as well as the number of strong wills outside it with whom she will have to coordinate, will require Hillary to be a diplomat among the diplomats.

Already, there has been internal friction. Clinton's team ruffled feathers last month when it evicted the department's senior Foreign Service officer and number-three official, Bill Burns, from his offices to make room for Hillary's deputy secretary for management, Jack Lew. (Burns was moved down the seventh-floor hallway, farther from Clinton's door, according to a *Foreign Policy* magazine blog.) Then there was the shabby treatment of retired Marine General Anthony Zinni, who says he was promised the post of U.S. ambassador to Iraq, only to discover that the job would instead go to Christopher Hill, the Bush administration's lead North Korea negotiator. The Foreign Service, meanwhile, saw the Mitchell and Holbrooke appointments as a slight—a suggestion that career diplomats are not up to the job. "The message she *wants* to send is that diplomacy's back," says one former top Clinton administration foreign policy hand. "But the message that's *received* is, 'We're not good enough to do the hard stuff.'"

Hillary doesn't need additional adversaries. She is already said to resent Susan Rice, a top Obama campaign foreign policy adviser who is now ambassador to the United Nations. Rice was among the first ex-Clintonites to support Obama, she harshly criticized Hillary's Iraq war vote, and she accused her of "manipulat[ing] the truth" during the campaign. Obama has elevated the U.N. ambassador post to cabinet rank, creating another power center in a team already awash with them. And, while some interpreted Rice's job as a kind of exile to New York, she still has deep roots in Washington, where her children are in school and her husband, Ian Cameron, is executive producer of ABC's "This Week." "That's ripe for conflict" with Clinton, warns a former Bush State Department official.

The role of Dennis Ross could also cause tension. During the early primaries, Ross straddled the fence between Clinton and Obama. But he quickly emerged as a top Obama adviser last summer, suggesting to some Clintonites that he'd been less neutral than he appeared. As a result, Ross felt that "he wouldn't really be welcome in Hillaryland," says one source familiar with the situation. After the election, Ross and James Jones, Obama's pick to run the National Security Council, initially discussed a White House job coordinating all U.S. policy from the Middle East to South Asia. According to this ver-

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sion of events, supported by a second source with close State Department contacts, Clinton balked at seeing Ross with so much authority over her department's work and brought him to State. With other envoys assigned to the Middle East and Afghanistan-Pakistan, Ross will now focus on Iran, but, given the deep connection between Iran and Israel policy, it's unclear how he will coordinate with Mitchell. From another direction, meanwhile, Holbrooke is now considering a diplomatic approach to Iran to deal with neighboring Afghanistan's opium problem. "How do those Venn diagrams overlap?" wonders one close observer of Middle East politics.

The hard-charging Holbrooke remains the biggest question mark. Asked how Holbrooke managed to bargain the bullying Serbian dictator Slobodan Milošević into a Balkan peace deal, Bill Clinton once replied: "Because he has the same character as Milošević." Holbrooke has longed to be secretary of state for decades, and probably would have achieved his dream if Al Gore, John Kerry, or Hillary herself had been elected president. Thus, it's not hard to imagine him second-guessing Hillary, his student for many years. As Clinton herself told *The New York Times* last week: "Occasionally he has to be, you know, brought down to earth and reined in."

Holbrooke's assertiveness risks other potential clashes. He has never worked closely, for instance, with General David Petraeus, who now oversees the U.S. military operation in Afghanistan. The two egos were on display at a panel during last weekend's Munich security conference, where Petraeus cracked wise about his new partnership: "You know, it's every commander's dream to have an ambassadorial wingman who is described by journalists with nicknames like 'The Bulldozer.'" Then there's Vice President Joe Biden. The two men, while outwardly friendly, have been rivals for years. "Neither would mind if the other disappeared," says a person who has worked closely with one of them. Finally, there is Holbrooke's uncertain relationship with Obama himself. For much of the 2008 campaign Holbrooke was a bête noire in the Obama camp—a foe of Obama's top campaign foreign policy adviser, Anthony Lake, and a symbol to many of the ill-advised enthusiasm of Washington Democrats for the Iraq invasion. It was only in late summer that Holbrooke, through what one associate calls "a lot of lobbying," was accepted into the fold. Asked about the state of Holbrooke's relationship with the president, his friend Les Gelb says only, "I think it's coming."

When Hillary was unable to manage conflicting egos and power centers within her campaign, the result was confusion and even embarrassment. The outcome can be similar when top bureaucrats fight. "Stovepiping" among rivals can lead to incomplete or bad information and reveal to foreign capitals that the United States is not speaking with one voice. You don't want, to take a hypothetical example, Petraeus sending signals of support for Afghan President Hamid Karzai while Holbrooke is signaling that Karzai must go. One source recalls how a lack of coordination within Bill Clinton's Middle East team during the 2000 Camp David accords meant that other Arab leaders had not been briefed properly when Clinton needed to call them with urgent requests to help Yasir Arafat accept a peace deal. "Stovepiping is a historical curse of the place," says Strobe Talbott, who is optimistic that Hillary can "exorcise that curse" from State.

Fortunately, there are signs that Hillary is paying better attention to management principles than she did when running for president. Much as after her arrival in the Senate, she has been working hard to familiarize herself with the culture of her new institutional home. "She has been systematically calling people who have direct, and relatively recent, experience in the place and really drilling down on all kinds of questions—including how to make sure that various parts of the department are integrated," says one person with firsthand knowledge of that process. Since taking the job, Clinton has met or spoken with every living secretary of state. One advantage is her very close friendship with former secretary of state Madeleine Albright, who has schooled Hillary in Foggy Bottom's machinations since the late 1990s, and who has recently been counseling her on the department's mores.

Hillary's choice of Steinberg, who has caused precious little controversy and made few enemies during his long career in the Democratic foreign policy establishment, is also reassuring. He is widely viewed as a hardworking and reliable honest broker. According to Hachigian, who served as his special assistant at the NSC in the late '90s, Steinberg "has just an uncanny ability to strike at the heart of a national security issue—but also to understand all the politics that go into it—how the media is going to respond, Congress and the partisan politics of the Hill, bureaucratic infighting."

Indeed, Steinberg comes well-armed to challenges posed by rivalries within a foreign policy team. In January, he and Kurt Campbell published a book, *Difficult Transitions: Foreign Policy Troubles at the Outset of Presidential Power*, which warns against a reliance on "all-stars"—high-profile figures with no inherent loyalty to the president. "[T]heir lack of a previous working relationship with the candidate and an unknown level of commitment to the president-elect's programs means that the decision to appoint them is something of a gamble," they write. "At best, they have been marginalized or ignored in the decision-making process"—Colin Powell is cited here—and "at worst they have caused significant disruption as a result of being seen as not team players (Alexander Haig, Donald Rumsfeld)." Under Steinberg's definition, Hillary would certainly qualify as a potentially disruptive "all-star." One hopes that his study of the question will help him to maneuver Hillary away from "significant disruption." (For the record, Steinberg calls Clinton "a fabulous choice" who brings a rare mix of communications, political, and policy chops to the job. "That trifecta of skills is very rare," he says.)

What's more, Hillary has taken the unusual step of appointing a second deputy, Jack Lew, to focus explicitly on management. Lew, a Queens native and Harvard grad, is a former Clinton White House budget director—an important qualification for a woman whose primary campaign ran out of cash in February. Lew will be charged with battling Congress to win more budget authority for the State Department and also with keeping an eye on the department's internal workings. Says one friend, "He's extraordinarily competent and even-tempered and a kind of anchoring figure—someone who, if there were some turbulence among the key players, would be able to enforce a certain amount of discipline and serenity."

Serenity may be too ambitious a goal, but one former senior Clinton administration foreign policy official jokes that Hillary's delegation of crisis hotspots will at least enable her to spend more time in the Washington loop. "Colin Powell didn't travel much, because he said every time he went out of town Cheney and Rumsfeld would launch some new policy initiative," the former official laughs. Thus, you'll typically be able to find the secretary working hard on the seventh floor. Talk to Cheryl Mills for an appointment. ◆

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The Scoop Factory

Inside Politico and the brave new world of post-print journalism.

GABRIEL SHERMAN

On the evening of January 22, a few hours after his administration's debut news conference, Barack Obama made a surprise visit to the cramped quarters of the White House press corps. It was meant to be a friendly event, and Obama glad-handed his way through reporters and cameramen, exchanging light banter as he went.

But *Politico* reporter Jonathan Martin wasn't there to chat. Martin pressed Obama about the president's decision to nominate William J. Lynn III, a former defense lobbyist, to deputy defense secretary and about Obama's pledge to curtail the influence of lobbyists. The exchange turned tense. "See, this is what happens. I can't end up visiting with you guys and shaking hands if I'm going to get grilled every time I come down here," a visibly exasperated Obama said. Martin wouldn't relent. "I just wanted to say hello and introduce myself to you guys—that's all I was trying to do," the president added. Within an hour, Martin and *Politico* writer Carrie Budoff Brown reported the exchange on *Politico*'s website: "Obama flashes irritation in press room," the headline read.

It was—as world events go—a small story. But *Politico* writers and editors are masters of knowing what will make prime time. Within a few hours, both *The Huffington Post* and *Drudge Report* linked to the story, and, by that evening, the conservative blogosphere lit up with items detailing the exchange. The next morning, Rush Limbaugh used the exchange to mock the new president ("You're not supposed to ask The Messiah questions unless he's cleared it," he sniffed). By the end of the day, the "affair" had made the rounds on CNN and Fox News.

If the 2004 campaign belonged to the blogs, this year's presidential contest was defined by the rise of the Web-print venture founded by banking scion and emerging media mogul Robert Allbritton and headed by *Washington Post* veterans John Harris and Jim VandeHei. From the start, their aim with *Politico* was to combine the Web's rapid-fire capacity with the legitimacy of traditional newspapering. Journalistically, their strategy was to out-report and outpace the newspapers that dominated election coverage, to get links up before readers reached their desks and BlackBerries in the morning, and to keep the news items going all afternoon for the prime-time cable pundits to digest at night.

And it worked. *Politico* succeeded in muscling its way into the political journalism firmament by the sheer volume of reporting and a shrewd—some might say obsessive—focus on the gossipy Beltway scoops and gaffes that appeal to the tabloid sensibility of *Drudge* and cable news. *Politico*'s readership spiked during the election, attracting 4.6 million unique readers in September 2008 (that's about one-third of the *Post*'s online readership). The following month, Nielsen ranked *Politico* the ninth-most-visited newspaper website in the country. *Politico* broke stories about John McCain forgetting how many homes he owned and Sarah Palin's six-figure wardrobe budget—stories that dominated the news cycle for days and forced establishment papers like *The New York Times* to follow with front-page stories. On Election Day, Chris Matthews crowed on "Hardball" that *Politico* was the "hottest political team in town," and wondered "is that still around, *The Washington Post*?"

That *Politico* was helped by the collapse of print journalism goes without saying. That it was also helped by cable news' insatiable appetite for the tabloid and the personal is also clear. But, two years into the *Politico* experiment, there is fascination around Washington with what could be considered the first Internet newspaper, and whether it represents a way to make a business out of political reporting. As traditional newspapers jettison staff, *Politico* is holding steady. This month, Allbritton told me the venture will turn a profit in six months. "We're way ahead of budget," he said. "It wouldn't surprise me if the profit this year would count in the millions of dollars."

Even Allbritton has been surprised at *Politico*'s profile: "I find it exceptionally weird the number of places I go, and people say, 'What do you do?' I say, 'I run some television stations and I run a newspaper.' They ask, 'Which one?' And, when I say '*Politico*,' they go, 'Oh, I read that all the time!' I'm thinking, *who are these people?* It's kind of creepy!"

Some questions about *Politico*'s sustainability remain. For one thing, it is in many ways a punishing place to work. More than a dozen staffers have left since it was launched, and many complain of the burnout pace. Second, the paper's business model is untested over the long haul: Even though the outfit is largely paid for by print advertisers who consider *Politico* a Washington must-read, the site's web traffic is down more than 50 percent from its pre-election peak. Survive or not, however, the organization has laid out a model for nonstop and unanalyzed reporting that newspapers, at their peril, have been slow to adopt.

The *Politico* newsroom occupies an open expanse on the ground floor of a sleek glass-and-steel tower among the anonymous offices of Rosslyn, Virginia. About three dozen reporters and editors work in cubicles alongside producers for ABC's Washington affiliate, Channel 7, and News Channel 8, both owned by Allbritton. It is quiet and clean. Televisions tuned silently to cable news hang on the walls, while editors sit in windowed offices looking into the newsroom.

Politico sits on the ground floor of the offices of Allbritton Communications, a privately held media concern run by Robert Allbritton, the 39-year-old heir to a broadcasting and banking fortune founded by his father Joe Allbritton. The Allbrittons, who controlled Riggs Bank for decades, have been major players in Washington politics and business since the Reagan administration, managing money for embassies, trusts, and the elite cadre of Beltway society. The senior Allbritton, a Texan who rarely gave press interviews, preferred the private trappings of Beltway power—raising champion thoroughbred horses, collecting art, and hosting lavish functions at his Northwest D.C. mansion. (PNC Financial bought Riggs Bank in 2004.)

An only child, Robert grew up to follow his father into the family business and became CEO of Riggs Bank in 2001. He

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too steered clear of media attention but was showy in other ways. In 2007, he and his wife Elena, a dermatologist, set a Washington real-estate record when they bought a nineteenth-century Georgetown mansion for $24 million. Affable and confident, Robert was more interested in his family's expanding media company—which in 2006 owned more than half a dozen TV stations—than in banking. In August 2006, Robert announced his plans to launch a congressional newspaper called the *Capitol Leader* to compete with *Roll Call* and *The Hill*.

It was around this time that John Harris, then national politics editor at *The Washington Post*, and Jim VandeHei, the *Post*'s White House correspondent, were discussing how much the media atmosphere had changed. Watching the coverage of the midterm elections convinced them that the Web's ability to deliver news almost instantly, combined with the ascendance of cable news and of reporters who had become brands unto themselves, had created an opening for an obsessively reported online political media outlet. At first, they tried to get the *Post* to sign on to their idea, but they quickly decided they wanted to do it on their own.

Harris was a force in the *Post*'s newsroom. A boyish-faced reporter and editor known for crafting lyrical prose, Harris started at the paper in 1985 as an intern and rose through the ranks to run all the *Post*'s political coverage. VandeHei, a former *Roll Call* and *Wall Street Journal* reporter, was known at the *Post* as an ambitious rising star. Beyond reporting, VandeHei harbored grander ambitions. "He's very entrepreneurial," says *New York Times* White House correspondent and former *Post* colleague Peter Baker. "He wanted to leave the *Post* because he wanted to run something."

Privately, Harris and VandeHei also believed traditional journalism was often complacent and self-important, and they wanted to challenge the status quo with brand-name reporter-bloggers who would break news and "explain how Washington really works," as they detailed in one internal memo.

In October 2006, Harris and VandeHei met with Allbritton to outline their plan. Allbritton agreed to bankroll their venture, and, in November, Harris and VandeHei told *Post* chairman Don Graham and managing editor Phil Bennett what they were doing. The paper had already suffered high-profile defections including style writer Mark Leibovich, Pulitzer Prize–winner Steve Coll, and reporter Hanna Rosin. The *Post* told the pair they could incubate their Web venture at the *Post*. But the two had made up their minds, and they weren't shy about their ambitions. "I think we'll show that we're better than *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*," VandeHei told *The New York Observer* at the time.

Politico's model would be a hybrid, its ads coming largely from the print edition at first, with a growing source of revenue from *Politico*'s website, which was to be updated constantly by a stable of well-known bloggers like Ben Smith and Jonathan Martin. Reporters' personalities and proclivities would be considered assets to be promoted, not hidden. And, for brand-name reporters, *Politico* was willing to pay stratospheric (by journalism standards) salaries. Top writers are rumored to make between $150,000 and $250,000. Last summer, *Politico* also signed some of their top talent to two-year contracts, according to sources.

In short order, *Politico* established itself as an outlet that could generate headlines that drove the news cycle, and its reporters and editors appeared regularly on the cable shows. On November 28, hours before the GOP debate in Florida, Smith got *Politico*'s first major scoop, detailing that former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani had billed city agencies to pay for personal travel to the Hamptons as he was beginning his romantic affair with Judith Nathan. The story was picked up by the *Times*, the *Post*, and the three network evening newscasts. (With the news breaking just eight weeks before the Florida primary, Giuliani's campaign never really recovered.)

As the primary season heated up, *Politico* broke exclusives such as Obama's visit to the home of former Weather Underground member Bill Ayers. During the presidential race, *Politico* reported that John McCain couldn't recall that he owned at least seven homes, that Obama never vetted Hillary Clinton for vice president, and that the Republican National Committee had spent more than $150,000 on Sarah Palin's wardrobe. Last year, *Politico*'s Web traffic jumped 219 percent. "I think they're a competitor," says *Times* Washington bureau chief Dean Baquet. Others around Washington agree. "There's no question they had a singular impact. They came out of nowhere in a matter of months and forced themselves into the conversation," says the *Times*' Baker. "*Politico* occupies a space *The Washington Post* should have occupied. If there is anyone who writes obsessively about politics, it should be the Washington newspaper."

Most metropolitan newsrooms wake up slowly. Not *Politico*, where speed rules. Reporters are expected to post items by the time congressional aides and White House staffers have their morning meetings. VandeHei has been known to e-mail staffers at 5:30 a.m., and reporters are posting items by 8. Almost all *Politico* staffers are given laptops and wireless modems so they can work anywhere. (They are also permitted to file news on any subject—including on anyone else's beat—if they have the goods, which has led some staff to complain about the free-for-all.)

Politico's top editors also admonish their staff to tailor their copy for the Web. During one staff meeting this summer, Harris and VandeHei told staffers that no *Politico* stories should run longer than 1,500 words. "There are no R.W. Apples anymore, and, if R.W. Apple wrote at *Politico*, all his stuff would be cut in half," one *Politico* reporter told me in July. (*Politico* does occasionally run long pieces, such as Roger Simon's nearly 20,000-word reconstruction of the Democratic race.) *Politico* reporters also file whenever news breaks. Shortly after 8 a.m. on November 10, while commuting to work, media reporter Michael Calderone learned that MSNBC's Joe Scarborough had just said "fuck" on air. Calderone, who often blogs from the back of taxis and buses, leapt off the crowded Mount Pleasant bus and blogged the YouTube clip from a park bench.

No one at *Politico* represents this new archetype more than Mike Allen, who joined *Politico* in December 2006. A former *Post* reporter and White House correspondent for *Time*, Allen is legendary around Washington for his marathon work hours. Allen broke a spate of exclusives during the campaign, including scoring the first interview with President Bush for an online outlet and breaking McCain's seven-houses gaffe. Every morning, he compiles "Playbook," a roundup of his own reporting, notable articles from major papers, and source-greasing shout-outs and birthday wishes to flacks and political aides. There is a manic quality to "Playbook": Allen capitalizes entire sentences for emphasis and formats each paragraph break so that copy can be read easily on a BlackBerry. (*Times* executive editor Bill Keller likened the e-mails to "a political junky's fraternity newsletter.") Ben Smith, who covered the Democratic presidential contest, recalls flying with Allen to Manchester, New Hampshire, on Hillary Clinton's plane the night of the Iowa caucus.

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Around dawn, as campaign reporters shuffled off to bed, Allen whipped out his laptop and began banging out that morning's "Playbook." "I'm ready to die, and Mike sits down in the lobby and starts writing," Smith tells me.

This pace has its drawbacks. Other D.C. journalists point out that *Politico* sometimes floats stories that haven't been confirmed, such as Smith's March 2007 report that John Edwards would drop out of the Democratic race to care for his cancer-stricken wife; or the January 2, 2008, report that Fred Thompson would drop out of the Republican primary (Thompson didn't give up his run for three more weeks). "The flip side is they get things wrong," says a veteran political reporter. "It's a desire to put something out that they've just learned."

For the most part, *Politico* staffers thrive on this high metabolism, but the stress boiled over last July, after Harris sent a terse e-mail to the staff telling them not to succumb to the summer "doldrums," according to multiple staffers. "It was not received in a very nice manner," one *Politico* staffer tells me. Harris says he never thought people at *Politico* were "goofing off." But he says he wanted his staff to realize that "we can't organize our thinking around the institutional rhythms of a newspaper. It's not OK to sprint for three days and then coast."

On July 21, Harris assembled the newsroom staff to discuss the matter. At the meeting, staffers received a memo written by Allen explaining *Politico*'s journalism philosophy. "We are not the AP or The New York Times. … If we ONLY do what those two great organizations do, WE WILL NOT SURVIVE AND WE WON'T HAVE JOBS," the memo read, according to a copy provided to THE NEW REPUBLIC. "THE REWARD for cracking this code," the memo concluded, "is that you're part of an enterprise … that is one of a tiny handful of news organizations in the WORLD that is actually GROWING."

Reporting, though, is only part of the equation: The motto around the *Politico* newsroom is to "win the morning, win the afternoon"—by which editors mean that *Politico*'s stories need to be the most talked-about and cited in that day's news cycle. One measure of winning is getting stories linked on sites like *Drudge Report* and *The Huffington Post*, which leads to appearances on the cable shows. *Politico* employs three publicists who routinely send out links to bloggers and producers. "We're pretty damn methodical about making sure anybody who cares about a story we wrote knows about it," VandeHei says. Allbritton tells me that, for too long, journalists have been overly squeamish at the idea of promoting their own work. "I think a lot journalists say there's something ethically and morally wrong about [p.r.]," he says. "I'm like, wait a minute, if you wrote a great story that's factually accurate, why would you be ashamed of that?"

Politico's pace and self-promotion has irritated some in the Washington press corps. "It's maddening. Everyone has to chase them," one Washington reporter complains. "You wind up running down these gotcha moments that are painful. … [I]t's the *New York Post* approach to generating news." After Martin's confrontation with Obama last month, *Wonkette* called *Politico* a "vulgar asshole of a publication" and announced the blog would cease linking to the site. "We will stop linking to these particularly retarded, trollish articles *Politico* frontpages just to get a crappy two-minute panel slot on [Anderson Cooper] 360 later in the night."

The *Times*' Bill Keller dismisses *Politico*'s scooplets as an insubstantial foundation on which to build a sustainable news organization. "If you hadn't reminded me, I couldn't have told you who broke the seven houses and the six-figure wardrobe budget. … *Politico* has focused on an inside game. I'm not sure if it translates to an outside game. I'm not sure how they get scale, and, if they don't, I'm not sure what the business model is."

ON ELECTION DAY, the staff of *Politico* gathered in the newsroom for cupcakes to celebrate reaching the finish line of a bruising two-year presidential campaign. The previous day, Harris and VandeHei had sent out a 2,600-word memo about *Politico*'s unfolding plans. The memo, clearly designed for public consumption, was a witty recap of *Politico*'s achievements and provided details of their plans to expand. "There is probably no one in the business more bullish than the two of us and [CEO] Fred [Ryan] and Robert [Allbritton]," the editors wrote, "optimism based not on hope but on concrete evidence to date about how our editorial model and business model are working."

Politico's staff is growing—the newsroom totals more than 60 staffers, and recent hires include former *Times* Pentagon correspondent David Cloud and former *New York Sun* reporter Josh Gerstein. Shortly after the election, *Politico* announced it would increase the frequency of its print edition from three to five days per week when Congress is in session and that it would reassign reporters to cover the White House; it also set up a blog, *Politico 44*, to chronicle the Obama administration. At least 68 newspapers and some 36 TV outlets have signed on to carry *Politico*'s content for free in exchange for a share of its advertising revenue.

Politico's advertising base so far has been insulated from the economic meltdown. One reason is that *Politico*'s advertisers are mainly lobbyists who need to sway Congress in good times and in bad. *Politico* also vastly undercuts the big dailies with lower ad rates (a full-page color ad costs $11,000, according to the rate card; a full-page ad in the *Times* runs more than $100,000). But Allbritton adds that he's not wedded to his print outlet: When the day comes that virtually all readers migrate online, he's happy to scrap the paper copy: "I said from the very beginning, I could care less if the revenue is on the print side or the Web side. As long as the revenue is there." Allbritton says *Politico* could conceivably be Web-only within five years. (Allbritton does concede that "a certain generation up there on the Hill" wants paper. "From their point of view, if you don't have a physical paper, you're not a player. I once joked, 'Why don't we take the website and print it out for them?' ")

Allbritton is dismissive of one of the things print papers did well—long-term, long-form investigative journalism—and tells me *Politico* is unlikely to field an investigative reporting squad. "I think we have to acknowledge that the money is spent for reputational benefits and a public service play," he says of the *Times*' and the *Post*'s investment in enterprise journalism. "Why does someone have to go off and write their thesis paper while they do it?" More than that, Allbritton worries that the newspaper model itself is collapsing. "I don't know if [the *Times* is] going to be around in a few years," he says. "I love the *Times*, but I'm worried."

Politico's challenge in the months ahead is to prove that its hyper-caffeinated approach, well-tailored to campaign coverage, will survive the slog of chronicling the Obama White House, Congress, and the debates over the economy and foreign policy. But it has one thing going for it, and that's success. As one Washington reporter puts it: "If that's the thing that makes money, I'm sure we'll all be doing it." ◆

ANTHONY RUSSO

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Lights On

A streetlamp, a sheep, and Dr. Phil—a parable of rebuilding Iraq.

ANNA BADKHEN

Baghdad, Iraq

In December 2007, the Alpha Company of the 4–64 Armor Battalion of the Fourth Brigade, Third Infantry Division, arrived in the neighborhood of Saidiyah in southwest Baghdad. More than half of the once-upscale, religiously mixed neighborhood's 60,000 residents had fled to Jordan, Syria, or other parts of Iraq. Those who stayed rarely ventured out of their homes. Up until a few months earlier, human corpses had littered the street, where stray dogs feasted on them. The police were responsible for collecting the bodies and delivering them to the morgue, but they tended to shirk this duty because warring militias often booby-trapped the bodies.

To reclaim Saidiyah from sectarian violence, Alpha Company worked on isolating it from the rest of the city. First, it finished a twelve-foot wall around the entire neighborhood. When the last Saidiyah house was cleared of weapons and suspected insurgents to the soldiers' satisfaction, the troops pronounced the area safe and encouraged former residents to return.

But the residents didn't come rushing back. Most of their neighborhood had been reduced to rubble: Gutted mansions riddled with bullet holes loomed, abandoned, over sewage pooling in craters from roadside bombs. The stores on Alwa Street, once a bustling commercial center of Saidiyah, were shuttered. And, in addition to the ruins, there was psychological devastation—a feeling that, even though the militias were gone, the neighborhood still wasn't safe. Contributing to this fear was the darkness.

Before the war, hookah bars, teashops, clothes stores, and restaurants stayed open late, drawing crowds of shoppers to Alwa Street after dark. Baghdadis like to shop well into the night, to avoid the afternoon heat. But, in the mayhem that followed the U.S. invasion, Saidiyah, like most of the country, lost electricity. On most evenings and nights, everything was completely dark.

By the time Alpha Company's new captain, Andrew "Drew" Betson, then a 25-year-old West Point graduate with a degree in military history, arrived in April 2008, it seemed clear to Iraqis and Americans alike that the first step to revitalizing Alwa Street would be lighting it. Simply rehooking its 45 light posts into the electricity network wouldn't solve the problem: Baghdad's dilapidated grid produced enough power for only two to four hours of electricity per day in some neighborhoods—in a city where summer temperatures can easily reach 124 degrees.

The common fix is for American troops to quickly install a 500-kilowatt generator, and then hire and oversee Iraqis to maintain it. But Betson, who liked to introduce himself to Iraqis in the street as "the new commander" (perhaps, in part, to compensate for his youthful appearance—without his intimidating body armor and protective eyewear, he looked young enough to command a boy scout troop), had been briefed on the intricacies involved in making reconstruction projects in Iraq successful. Betson and his commanders had a different plan: The Americans would buy the generator, but, after this initial investment, its operation would be entirely self-sufficient. Nearby shops would buy excess power, and the money would pay for generator fuel and maintenance, providing an important example that capitalism can work in Baghdad. Even more important, as the U.S. commitment to Iraq dwindles, the project would help Iraqis to stand on their own.

But, in order to make this plan a reality, Betson knew he couldn't just throw up the generator and tell the Iraqis they were in charge. Billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars have been wasted on unsuccessful reconstruction projects because Americans have failed to realize that just as important as cash is the Iraqi buy-in—the support and cooperation of the local community. For this more elusive commodity, Betson needed the services of a tall, sinewy Iraqi known as "Dr. Phil." It was Dr. Phil who came up with the sheep.

I met Dr. Phil, whose real name is Lutfi Saber Al Abosi, in a smoky office of Saidiyah's neighborhood council. An overhead fan—running off a private generator—ruffled an arrangement of plastic roses and carnations on a giant, polished desk, sending the stifling summer heat around the room in waves. Other Iraqi men in the room wore traditional ankle-length dresses; Dr. Phil, who is 48, donned a pink button-down shirt with pressed khaki slacks. He spoke rapidly, in slightly accented English, peppering the conversation with crude jokes. (Upon learning that I am married and have only two children, he inquired: "The generator is still working?")

Dr. Phil's easygoing manner belies a life with its share of tragedy. In his twenties, he had a wife, played drums in a rock band (The Dancing Bees, in honor of the Bee Gees), and owned a store that sold cosmetics and perfume in downtown Baghdad. But, in 1992, he was arrested for supporting Ayad Allawi, the former Baath party leader turned exiled dissident. He spent the next ten years on death row in Saddam Hussein's dungeons. While Dr. Phil was awaiting execution, he lost his shop, and his wife divorced him. "Intelligence officers kept knocking at her door day and night," Dr. Phil explained.

In October 2002, after Saddam announced a general amnesty a few months before the U.S. invasion, Dr. Phil was released. After the invasion began, he found a job translating for U.S. forces. He currently divides his time between Amman, Jordan, where his parents live as refugees, and Baghdad, where he is the founding director of the World Brotherhood and Peace Organization. The non-governmental agency has had at least one project financed by grants it received from U.S. forces for serving as a middleman—nominally, between the troops and the Iraqi contractors. In reality, Dr. Phil's artful mediation is between the Western culture of action and instant gratification and Iraq's way of doing business: an intricately choreographed ballet that involves forging tribal alliances, appeasing the egos of elders and government officials, and showing ordinary Iraqis that a project has the blessing of all proper authorities on earth and in heaven.

Initially, as the U.S. military adopted a campaign to win over Iraqi hearts and minds, troops were encouraged to step

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into this role themselves. But, for many, adopting the etiquette and customs of Iraq didn't come easy. Engaging all the Iraqi actors typically adds weeks, or even months, to the completion of any project and involves many seemingly pointless conversations about families or American pop music over tasty but time-consuming meals at sheiks' houses, thus contradicting everything American officers are trained to be: "aggressive, confident, A-type personalities," as one Army captain described it. As Major Timothy "T.J." Reed, a civil-affairs officer in Baghdad, put it, "I see where I'm at, I see my goal. Do I have to eat?"

But storming the hill, Reed and several American military contractors in Iraq told me, is the approach that has cost the United States billions of dollars in projects that simply faded into the country's dust-caked landscape, abandoned because the Iraqis did not feel invested in them. Take, for example, the Americans' failed effort to expand the outdoor Dora Market. Fabled for its fresh fish and cheap vegetables, the downtown Baghdad market is a claustrophobic hodgepodge of stalls laden with produce, carts overflowing with freshwater carp, and shops selling everything from bootleg DVDs to freshly slaughtered lamb, all squeezed between a major city artery and a set of railroad tracks.

After getting the sectarian violence that plagued the market under control, American troops decided to improve the conditions of what, to them, still looked like an unsanitary location and a likely spot for a potential terrorist attack. They found a plot of land a few blocks away, built 200 cement stalls in neat rows and pens for animals, threw in a couple of modern bathrooms with flush-down toilets, and surrounded the whole thing with a tall fence to ward off suicide bombers.

But Iraqi vendors were wary of the new market. They didn't want to move from their historic spots by the railroad and the bigger shops. Then, Reed explained, it turned out that the plot that the Americans had assumed was no-man's-land in fact belonged to an Iraqi family that now wanted compensation. "You can either rush to fail, or you can slow down for success," said Reed, who worked as a city planner in New Mexico. "I always preach slowing down for success."

But, in addition to the cultural challenge of learning to slow down, American troops increasingly don't have the time or manpower to do the legwork required. They are worn out by multiple deployments and stretched thin by their many duties. Plus, now that a swift withdrawal seems inevitable, the troops will have to dedicate more time and effort to training Iraqi forces. This will leave them with even less time to spend on getting sheiks to commit to reconstruction projects.

In late summer 2008, residents of the Saidiyah neighborhood in Baghdad watch as electricians install a new light post on busy Alwa Street.

For these reasons, the military has recently learned to lean on the Dr. Phils of Iraq. For months, Dr. Phil shuttled between the fortified former warehouse on Saidiyah's western border where Alpha Company was deployed and the manicured gardens and stuffy parlors of local sheiks, talking shop with the Americans and drinking gallons of hot tea with the Iraqis. He gave the Americans what they wanted to see: a blueprint for the generator project, with estimates, dates, and figures. He also gave the Iraqis what they wanted: the understanding that, when the project was completed, they would get the credit—and the gratitude of Saidiyah's residents.

In addition to cajoling the sheiks, Dr. Phil had another idea for insuring the generator's success. On a

ANNA BADKHEN

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scorching May afternoon, he invited Betson and a group of soldiers to a sun-drenched intersection on Alwa Street, where a stocky Iraqi in rolled-up gray sweatpants dragged a filthy sheep along the tiled sidewalk. The Iraqi's name was Bassam the Butcher, and, true to his name, he put his right foot—shod in a rubber, manure-caked flip-flop—just below the animal's neck, pinning it to the ground, and, with one swift movement of a short, thin blade, slashed its neck. Betson and his company lowered their M4 rifles and snapped pictures with their digital cameras.

After methodically repeating the procedure on three more sheep, Bassam carried plastic bags sloshing with blood across the street, to the 500-kilowatt generator, fuel tank, and transformer booth that Betson and his company had recently installed. There, the butcher and some neighborhood boys dipped their hands into the sacrificial blood and pressed their palms against the canary yellow walls of the spanking-new equipment.

The ancient tradition of public ritual slaughter has made a comeback in Iraq since the war began. Bloody handprints adorn the metal gates of houses of newlyweds and recently freed detainees. Sacrificing the sheep on the sidewalk and then smearing the generator with their blood, Dr. Phil explained, would show Saidiyah's residents that the people behind the project shared their culture, their beliefs, and their superstitions. For this reason, he paid for the sheep and for the butcher's services out of his own pocket—$180, more than half the average monthly income in Iraq, per sheep. "This is something private," Dr. Phil said, as he watched Bassam the Butcher work. "It's for me, for my family, for Saidiyah."

Betson seemed relatively comfortable with the proceedings. (During the slaughter, Betson—whose training as a military engineer who lays, detects, and disarms mines taught him, quite incongruously, how to skin a rabbit—looked more amused than grossed out.) He patiently watched the ceremony and then joined Dr. Phil and a small group of other Iraqis for lunch in the living room of Ali Al Ameri, an important neighborhood leader. But, as Betson and several of his soldiers slumped in upholstered couches and armchairs around low tables laden with rice, fresh vegetables, tabouleh, and roasted chicken, the limits of their cultural outreach became apparent. One soldier was spitting brown saliva mixed with chewing tobacco into a plastic bottle, and Al Ameri was politely trying not to notice.

All of a sudden, the front door flew open and in walked Sheik Ali Al Allawi, his colossal frame clothed in an impeccably white flowing robe. He was carrying a giant pewter tray laden with steaming chunks of grilled liver, and Dr. Phil and Al Ameri nodded in approval. The liver, too, was part of the ritual to dedicate the generator.

"Fresh," the sheik announced, brimming under his thick black mustache as he lowered the tray onto a table. "Never been frozen!"

Betson rolled his eyes, theatrically, mouthing the words "sacrificial liver." The Americans respectfully observed the ritual but declined to take a bite.

On June 10, a few weeks after the sheep sacrifice, hundreds of Saidiyah residents gathered on Alwa Street to watch the 45 light posts, each crowned with four pinkish lights, illuminate the street for the first time in years. Fares Ali Al Qabi, an influential Saidiyah leader who is competing for the sheikdom of his tribe, described the scene. "I saw people's faces, how they lit up, as though something great had happened in their own house," Al Qabi recalled. "There was a crowd outside, but no one worried about terrorists. All the people came—Sunni, Shia, Kurds, Christians. I still remember it: All the people together, happy."

It was an August night, and we were standing outside Sun City Foods, a lamb burger joint on Alwa Street. Around us, a transformed Alwa Street bustled with life. Cars honked at pedestrians who absentmindedly strolled off the crowded sidewalks, gawking at colorful windows of stores that now stayed open well after dark. Small groups of willowy young women flocked into Yasini Al Naami's hair salon, which Al Naami—her locks rolled up in tinfoil twists—opened as soon as the street lights went on. The street lights, she said, made her feel safe. "Every store on Alwa Street is open now," said Sheik Al Allawi, who lives with two of his four wives and a dozen of his 24 children in a house less than a block away. "Shops stay open past midnight."

Over a sweating 7-Up at Sun City Foods, Al Qabi claimed that the idea of lighting Alwa Street belonged to him and other neighborhood elders—the best indicator of the project's success. But, although Al Qabi took credit for coming up with the idea, he acknowledged that Dr. Phil—whom Saidiyah's sheiks call, respectfully, "Doctor Lutfi," even though he has no doctorate or medical degree—was the one who "made this happen."

Betson beamed as he showed off the reincarnated Alwa Street and posed for snapshots under a light. ("This one's for the folks back home," he said, drawing his M4 rifle close to his chest and lifting his chin.) If he felt slighted that Al Qabi named Dr. Phil, and not him, as the man who turned on the lights in Saidiyah, he didn't show it. After all, this was a sure sign of Iraqi buy-in.

The successful relighting of Alwa Street seemed to signal that there is no better way to guarantee Iraqis' commitment to reconstruction than for the Americans to step back and put them in charge of it. But, even then, one careless move can plunge a whole street back into darkness.

About two weeks before I shared a 7-Up with Al Qabi, something happened that reminded the residents of Alwa Street that their project—like their country—was still not entirely their own. Returning from a routine patrol, one of Alpha Company's 30-ton Bradleys "took a right and took it a little too sharp," Betson said. It hit one of the electric poles on Alwa Street, bending it. The wires ripped. The lights went out. "Even though I knew it was an accident, I was so sad. It was as though something happened to me, or to my child," Al Qabi told me.

It took nearly two weeks for the lights to be repaired. The day I arrived to talk to Al Qabi, a group of electricians perched in a white cherry picker were affixing wires to a new pole. The sun had already set, but the air was still well above 110 degrees. Dust from a recent sandstorm still hung above Baghdad, and the street felt a bit like the inside of a vacuum cleaner. Faruk Al Timimi, the owner of Sun City Foods, periodically peeked outside to check on the electricians' progress as he was trying to decide whether to close his restaurant for the night. He was using power from a pricey neighborhood generator that shut down from time to time, submerging the diners inside his joint's mirrored interior into darkness. Finally, the electricians outside came down from their truck. One of the men strolled over to the transformer booth and pulled the switch. Along the length of Alwa Street, for the moment at least, the pinkish lights flickered on. ◆

Anna Badkhen has reported extensively from Iraq. She is working on a book about war and food.

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

CRIME AND PASSION

The title of an Italian film, *Gomorrah*, is a play on words. The subject is not the biblical sinkhole: it is the Camorra, the local Mafia of Naples, which—according to the film and the book that it is based on—has made Naples an equivalent sinkhole. That book was written by Roberto Saviano, a Neapolitan historian and journalist, and was so ruthlessly candid that it became a huge best-seller in Italy, possibly even a cause for some social action. Its accuracy endangered Saviano's life: he now lives in hiding under another name.

"Mafia" is probably the best-known Italian word in America after "pasta" and "pizza." The Camorra, presumably because its doings are more centralized, is less familiar here than the Mafia, but it is equally vicious. (I had heard of the Camorra only because it figures in Wolf-Ferrari's opera *The Jewels of the Madonna*, which is set in Naples. One never knows when opera will help.) The Camorra has a stranglehold on Naples and southern Italy. Many kinds of crime, including drugs, assassinations, and industrial and judicial corruption, make it very profitable. Dripping with wealth, it invests abroad. According to Saviano, the Camorra has even invested in the reconstruction of the former World Trade Center site in New York.

He and five other writers have wrought a screenplay from his book—not a documentary but fact-based fiction. The director was Matteo Garrone, experienced in both document and drama, who says that the material was so visually powerful that he filmed it as if he were an accidental witness, "a passerby who happened to find myself there by chance." This approach turns out to be apt: many sequences consist of casual motion from face to face and back, rather than formal editing, as if Garrone were watching, not directing. Much of the camera work is handheld, as if it were impromptu. The only element that resembles a visual motif is the recurrence of a blue tinge in some shots, possibly to suggest contiguous atmosphere.

Not many of us nowadays think that Naples is typified by "'O Sole Mio"; still, *Gomorrah* is an aesthetic antidote for any who have seen the city as tourists. No sequence in the picture has an iota of travel-folder Italy. Except for some commonplace apartments, Garrone has shown his people in their bleak environment—Scampia, a suburb of Naples—in which they seem like jungle creatures at home.

The film begins with a prelude. Five men are in a suntanning parlor, chatting and kidding. Then suddenly one of them pulls a pistol and shoots the other four in the head. We never learn who those men were or why they were shot. The sequence is merely an atmospheric overture.

We then embark on five stories that are braided throughout the picture. Two of them involve teenagers with Camorra ambitions. Another is about a bagman who carries money to families with Camorra relatives in jail. Another is about a big-money deal for the disposal of toxic waste. The fifth is about a gifted ladies' tailor. A smart Camorra racket is cheap knock-offs of expensive dresses. A Chinese gang in Naples sets up the same sort of game and tries to steal their rival's tailor. The Camorra, need we note, prevails. As for the acting, everyone in the cast fits his role precisely, which is about all that can be asked of them in this mosaic structure.

Garrone has made the most of the subject that he thought so powerful visually. Two instances. In one sequence a couple of drug dealers, enlisting future customers, hand out free envelopes of dope to kids who scramble to get them. A shooting kills a driver whose van then careens into a stonemason's yard, damaging a lot of funeral statuary. Through all of the above we do not encounter one non-criminal Italian. Most of these men have principles, Camorra-style. Just as the Mafia does, the Camorra provides not only money but ethics. All these people were born and live in a society of firm beliefs, honored for decades.

GOMORRAH
IFC Films

OUR CITY DREAMS
Di San Luca Films

Saviano's book (unread by me) is reported to be more intense than previous Italian books on organized crime. Its success is certainly due in some measure to its sensational facts, but its intent was investigation and disclosure, along with, surely, a hope for purgative action. The film, however, is ipso facto quite a different creature. Based on actuality, it is nonetheless not a document. It is enacted and directed, and thus in its very being it is a different experience from a factual book. More: it can hardly have been intended to move anyone to social and political action. It is intended to fascinate, like a pit of vipers (while we listen to mellow Neapolitan songs). However grave its social source, it is here one more brutal gangland movie.

The complete absence of any moral contrast in the film fits the change in latter-day audience appetites. Earlier

ANTHONY RUSSO

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gangster films rampaged through corruption and killing but always contained at least a final touch of justice done and morality triumphant—anyway, some evidence of a different society. That touch was often mechanical, but it was considered necessary. Now the need for reminders of a moral context around gangland has shrunk. Perhaps this is because of the audience's greater interest in naturalism. Even more possibly, the audience doesn't want its two-hour underworld holiday disturbed. (*The Godfather* may be the point at which the change was sealed.)

So *Gomorrah*, which in book form is apparently a consequential work, is here endowed with actors' persons and audible murders and becomes something else. Most certainly there are fiction films being made worldwide out of anger and heartbreak at crime and corruption. (See any annual review of the Human Rights Watch Film Festival.) But few of us would imagine that these are the motives behind *Gomorrah*. For those who want it, this picture provides one more two-hour plunge into a world of scabrous conventions.

A documentary called *Our City Dreams* has an epigraph from Susan Sontag: "I was not looking for my dreams to interpret my life, but rather for my life to interpret my dreams." It fits.

The director is an Italian woman, Chiara Clemente; her subjects are five women who are artists in New York, so we expect a film with a feminist base. This turns out to be true, but feminism is not its sole point. When we meet the women, we are told the year when each arrived in the city, so we expect accounts in the classic vein of arrival and establishment in a metropolis. This, too, turns out to be true, but not the sole point. Presumably Clemente had those ideas in mind when she started, but her subjects apparently overwhelmed her.

Each of the five women gets about sixteen minutes of screen time. (There is no intercutting: the film is a series of solos.) First is the woman who calls herself Swoon, probably the youngest, who came to New York in 1998. She is pleasantly voluble as she describes her reactions to the concept of space that she found in New York. She is busy with her woodcuts and other things while she confides in Clemente. Some of her work has already been in the Museum of Modern Art, and the party celebrating this accomplishment is up to date.

Next is an Egyptian, Ghada Amer, in New York since 1996, who manages to be both reticent and engaging. She, too, as she talks, works—on her large lacy drawings and paintings. We go back with her to Cairo on a visit to her parents, who are of course proud but who seemingly had to acquire an understanding of her delicate art. The visit over, Amer returns to Manhattan, busy as ever.

Kiki Smith, commandingly brisk, in New York since 1976, is a well-known sculptor. While she works, she wonders why there are no figures of middle-aged women. There are innumerable figures of young women, she says, and some elderly ones, but none of the middle-aged. Perhaps the energetic Smith is filling the gap.

Marina Abramovic, born in Serbia, is a performance artist who has been based in New York since 2004 after many appearances elsewhere. Surrounded by solid art works, Abramovic's performances aim to make the most of their ephemeral quality. Like all performers, she wants to impress minds and sensibilities so that they remember. This is a more difficult task for her highly personal work than for formal actors and dancers who have nests of tradition. With Abramovic, we travel to Thailand a year after the tsunami, and there she instructs men in (literally) punishing the sea by beating it with whips. They presumably will not forget it.

The last of the women is the oldest, Nancy Spero, who has been in New York since 1964 and is still busy with painting of political import. (I remember her protest painting during the Vietnam War.) We see her eightieth birthday party, and subsequently she returns to work. She has her own ideas about everything. Sometimes she paints on odd small pieces of wood that can be hung as one chooses.

Then there is a sixth artist, the director Clemente. Together with her editor, Martin Levenstein, she has fashioned a film that hums with energy and delight. (We can hear it through Thomas Lauderdale's flexible score.) Beyond the fact that she and her subjects are women (which certainly is not incidental to the texture of the piece), and beyond the influence of New York (which is marked), Clemente has composed a lively ballad about vitality and will. Each of her subjects is infused with purpose, with clarity of values—as is Clemente. Quite apart from the art that we see in *Our City Dreams*, the film itself is art that celebrates devotion. ◆

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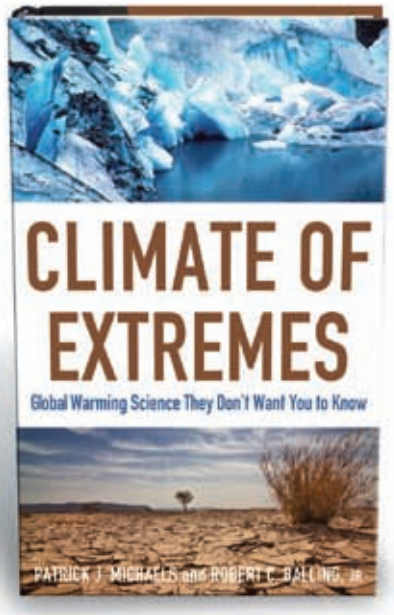

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Paul Starr

GOODBYE TO THE AGE OF NEWSPAPERS (HELLO TO A NEW ERA OF CORRUPTION)

Why American politics and society are about to be changed for the worse.

I.

We take newspapers for granted. They have been so integral a part of daily life in America, so central to politics and culture and business, and so powerful and profitable in their own right, that it is easy to forget what a remarkable historical invention they are. Public goods are notoriously under-produced in the marketplace, and news is a public good—and yet, since the mid-nineteenth century, newspapers have produced news in abundance at a cheap price to readers and without need of direct subsidy. More than any other medium, newspapers have been our eyes on the state, our check on private abuses, our civic alarm systems. It is true that they have often failed to perform those functions as well as they should have done. But whether they can continue to perform them at all is now in doubt.

Even before the recession hit, the newspaper industry was facing a mortal threat from the rise of the Internet, falling circulation and advertising revenue, and a long-term decline in readership, as the habit of buying a daily paper dwindled from one generation to the next. The recession has intensified these difficulties, plunging newspapers into a tailspin from which some may not recover and others will emerge only as a shadow of their former selves. The devastation is already substantial. At the *Los Angeles Times*, the cumulative effect of cutbacks has been to reduce its newsroom by one-half—and that was before its parent company, Tribune, declared bankruptcy. Another company weighed down by debt, the McClatchy chain, which includes *The Sacramento Bee*, *The Miami Herald*, and twenty-eight other dailies, has laid off one-quarter of its workforce in the past year; according to one executive, the editorial downsizing is under 20 percent but is now cutting "close to the bone." And highly leveraged media companies are not the only ones that are retrenching. At the largest daily in New Jersey, *The Star-Ledger*, 45 percent of the editorial staff took buyouts in October when the owner, Advance Publications, threatened to sell the paper if its targets for cuts were not met.

Newspapers are also shrinking in numbers of pages, breadth of news coverage, features of various kinds, and home delivery of print editions. All over America, as newspaper revenues plummet—by the end of 2008, ad sales were down about 25 percent from three years earlier—publishers cannot seem to shed editors, reporters, and sections of their papers fast enough. And there is more pain to come. According to a December forecast by Barclays Capital, advertising revenue will drop another 17 percent in 2009 and 7.5 percent more the year after. Even *The New York Times*, which has seen its cash reserves fall and its debt downgraded, is unlikely to escape the massive contraction now accelerating throughout the industry.

Should we care? Some observers, confident of the blessings of technology, refuse to shed any tears for the traditional giants of journalism, on the grounds that their troubles are of their own making and of little consequence to the general welfare. In this view, regardless of whether newspapers successfully adapt to the Internet, new and better sources of news will continue developing online, and they will fill whatever void newspapers leave. Others are so angry at the mainstream media—the reviled "MSM"—that they see the economic misery of the press as a deserved comeuppance. Let the bastards suffer.

These reactions fail to take into account the immediate realities and the full ramifications of the crisis threatening newspaper journalism. This is no time for Internet triumphalism: the stakes are too high. Nearly all other news media, except for online news, are also retrenching, and—particularly at the metropolitan, regional, and state levels—the online growth is not close to offsetting the decline elsewhere. Despite all the development of other media, the fact is that newspapers in recent years have continued to field the majority of reporters and to produce most of the original news stories in cities across the country. Drawing on studies conducted by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, Tom Rosenstiel, the project's director, says that as of 2006 a typical metropolitan paper ran seventy stories a day, counting the national, local, and business sections (adding in the sports and style sections would bring the total closer to a hundred), whereas a half-hour of television news included only ten to twelve. And while local TV news typically emphasizes crime, fires, and traffic tie-ups, newspapers provide most of the original coverage of public affairs. Studies of newspaper and broadcast journalism have repeatedly shown that broadcast news follows the agenda set by newspapers, often repeating the same items, albeit with less depth.

Online there is certainly a great profusion of opinion, but there is little reporting, and still less of it subject to any rigorous fact-checking or editorial scrutiny. Other than news aggregators such as Google News—which link to articles from publications that still derive most of their revenue from print—the most successful news sites are oriented to specialized audiences. No online enterprise has yet generated a stream of revenue to support original reporting for the general public comparable to the revenue stream that newspapers have generated in print.

Whether the Internet will ever support general-interest journalism at a level comparable to newspapers, it would be foolish to predict. The reality is that resources for journalism are now disappearing from the old media faster than new media can develop them. The financial crisis of the press may thereby compound the media's crisis of legitimacy. Already under ferocious attack from both left and right for a multitude of sins, real and imagined, the press is going to find its job even more difficult to do under economic duress. And as it retrenches in the face of financial pressures, Rosenstiel says, "More of American life will occur in shadows. We won't know what we won't know."

Paul Starr is Stuart professor of communications and public affairs at the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University and the author most recently of Freedom's Power (Basic Books).

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One danger of reduced news coverage is to the integrity of government. It is not just a speculative proposition that corruption is more likely to flourish when those in power have less reason to fear exposure. The World Bank produces an annual index of political corruption around the world, based on surveys of people who do business in each country. In a study published in 2003 in *The Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization*, Alicia Adserà, Carles Boix, and Mark Payne examine the relationship between corruption and "free circulation of daily newspapers per person" (a measure of both news circulation and freedom of the press). Controlling for economic development, type of legal system, and other factors, they find a very strong association: the lower the free circulation of newspapers in a country, the higher it stands on the corruption index. Using different measures, they also find a similar relationship across states within the United States: the lower the news circulation, the greater the corruption. Another analysis published in 2006, a historical account by the economists Matthew Gentzkow, Edward L. Glaeser, and Claudia Goldin, suggests that the growth of a more information-oriented press may have been a factor in reducing government corruption in the United States between the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era.

Such studies cannot prove a causal connection, or predict the effects of diminished news coverage in the future—but there are other grounds for concern. Newspapers are cutting bureaus and staff that enable the public to monitor government as well as business, and some papers are laying off veteran reporters who have exposed major scandals. When they were financially strong, newspapers were better able not only to invest in long-term investigative projects but also to stand up against pressure from politicians and industries to suppress unfavorable stories. As imperfect as they have been, newspapers have been the leading institutions sustaining the values of professional journalism. A financially compromised press is more likely to be ethically compromised.

And while the new digital environment is more open to "citizen journalism" and the free expression of opinions, it is also more open to bias, and to journalism for hire. Online there are few clear markers to distinguish blogs and other sites that are being financed to promote a viewpoint from news sites operated independently on the basis of professional rules of reporting. So the danger is not just more corruption of government and business—it is also more corruption of journalism itself.

II.

These developments raise practical questions for anyone concerned about the future of American democracy. If the traditional ways of sustaining professional journalism are insufficient, what models are there to support the genuinely vital public functions that the press has traditionally performed? How do these alternatives fit into the new digital environment? To answer those practical questions, it is necessary first to ponder a more theoretical one. Along with other new technology, the Internet was supposed to bring us a cornucopia of information, and in many respects it has done so. But if one of its effects is to shrink the production of professionally reported news, perhaps we need to understand the emerging framework of post-industrial society and politics somewhat differently.

For the past three hundred years, newspapers have been able to develop and flourish partly because their readers have almost never paid the full cost of production. From the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century, many newspapers were politically subsidized, directly by governments or through political parties. Then, as consumer markets expanded, newspapers increasingly sold not just news to readers, but also readers to advertisers. And the more advertisers they gained, the less dependent they were on any single one.

The key to the rise of independent and powerful newspapers in the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was their role as market intermediaries—that is, in connecting large numbers of sellers (advertisers) and buyers in a local area. That role required changes in content, language, and design, so as to appeal to a wider public that included women, working-class, and immigrant readers. Instead of narrowly focusing on politics and business, newspapers now had an interest in presenting a wider range of stories. The result was a succession of editorial innovations in the coverage of sports, crime, entertainment, and community life, and the addition of such features as interviews, comics, and gossip columns. The coverage of politics and business changed, too, as newspapers increasingly presented more color, context, and analysis instead of reprinting long speeches by politicians or merely chronicling events—a shift that intensified once radio and later television took over much of the business of breaking news.

Although the rise of broadcast journalism changed the newspaper business, radio and television did not kill it because newspapers retained their local advantages in providing information to readers and connecting advertisers and consumers in a city. A diverse and highly competitive industry as of the early 1900s, newspapers consolidated through the middle decades of the twentieth century; and though many papers disappeared, the surviving ones became hugely profitable. No one has explained why newspapers became so lucrative better than the investor Warren Buffett. In his annual letter to Berkshire Hathaway stockholders in 2006, Buffett wrote that until the Internet, newspapers had been

> as easy a way to make huge returns as existed in America. As one not-too-bright publisher famously said, "I owe my fortune to two great American institutions: monopoly and nepotism." No paper in a one-paper city, however bad the product or however inept the management, could avoid gushing profits.
>
> The industry's staggering returns could be simply explained. For most of the twentieth century, newspapers were the primary source of information for the American public. Whether the subject was sports, finance, or politics, newspapers reigned supreme. Just as important, their ads were the easiest way to find job opportunities or to learn the price of groceries at your town's supermarkets.
>
> The great majority of families therefore felt the need for a paper every day, but understandably most didn't wish to pay for two. Advertisers preferred the paper with the most circulation, and readers tended to want the paper with the most ads and news pages. This circularity led to a law of the newspaper jungle: Survival of the Fattest.
>
> Thus, when two or more papers existed in a major city (which was almost universally the case a century ago), the one that pulled ahead usually emerged as the stand-alone winner. After competition disappeared, the paper's pricing power in both advertising and circulation was unleashed. Typically, rates for both advertisers and readers would be raised annually—and the profits rolled in. For owners, this was economic heaven.

If there is one overriding factor behind the current financial crisis of the press, it is simply that the Internet has undermined the newspaper's role as market intermediary. Advertisers do not need to

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piggyback on the news to reach consumers, and consumers have other ways to find out about products and sales. Newspapers also cannot possibly duplicate online the monopoly position that they have enjoyed in print during recent decades as the sole surviving papers in their metropolitan area, and so they no longer have the pricing power for ads that Buffett describes as "economic heaven." Craigslist, eBay, and many other sites provide alternatives—and none of them bears any cost of news production.

To read the news, moreover, consumers do not need to pay for it online. Newspapers have been able to make money from their print editions at both ends: by charging advertisers for eyeballs, and by charging the eyeballs, too. But online there are other news sources such as sites run by TV and radio stations, which have never charged their viewers or listeners. So, for newspapers, there goes circulation as well as advertising income.

To be sure, more newspaper websites could follow the example of *The Wall Street Journal* and charge for premium content. But sources of financial news have always been able to set higher prices than other news media because of the value that business readers derive from reliable, up-to-the-minute information. The problem for most newspapers is that restricting access to their websites would not only cost them ad revenue but potentially allow another news organization to seize their role online. Either way, by giving away their content or limiting access, they may be digging their own graves.

The implications of these developments for the public role of newspapers are dire. Think of the newspaper as a collection of different lines of business represented by its various sections, from the news pages to the classifieds. Insofar as newspapers have upheld a public-service vision, they have been engaged in cross-subsidy, using their profitable lines of business, such as the classifieds, to pay for news coverage that probably would have been hard to justify on a narrower view of return on investment. Especially in recent decades, when newspapers were cash cows, their owners could afford to pursue public-service journalism, and some of them did (others just milked their papers for all they were worth). In addition, Buffett's law of the newspaper jungle, the "survival of the fattest," favored a broad conception of the purview of the newspaper, attentive to a wide variety of human interests. Now the incentives are working in the opposite direction, pushing newspapers toward a more constricted view of their role.

As if these trends are not bad enough, newspapers have been in the midst of an accelerating slide in circulation and readership. During the past half-century, the share of the public following the news in any medium has fallen, and newspapers have been hit especially hard. The percentage of Americans who buy a newspaper is half what it was in 1945, and the absolute number of papers sold has been declining since the mid-1980s. According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations, after falling about 2 percent annually, newspaper circulation in mid-2008 was down nearly 5 percent compared to the previous year. A study by the Pew Research Center for People and the Press finds that from 2006 to 2008 the proportion of Americans who say they read a newspaper the previous day in print alone (or both in print and online) dropped sharply, from 38 percent to 30 percent. The additional Web-only readers did not make up the difference. Altogether, print and online readership combined still fell from 43 percent to 40 percent of the public.

III.

Of course, a medium that 40 percent of the public still claim to read should not be pronounced dead yet. The situation is also a bit more complicated, and more hopeful, than these trends suggest. Total readership of news that originates from newspapers has probably at least stabilized. Online, many people read news items on blogs and other sites that take items from the press, and the news junkies among us are reading more news from more papers than they did before the Internet made the sampling of multiple publications so easy. And some newspapers are clearly gaining wider reach online. Now that they are available to readers throughout the United States and all over the world, the leading national papers such as *The New York Times* are more widely read than ever. Although they have not yet figured out how to monetize all that increased readership, at least they have a prospect of ultimately surviving the transition to the Web.

At the other end of the scale, some small community newspapers are also in relatively good shape, mainly because print still has advantages for very locally targeted small-business advertising. The newspapers that seem most endangered by current trends are the ones in the middle—metros that do not draw substantial numbers of readers from beyond their regions. Some of them have been losing print circulation at a staggering rate—10 percent in the past year; and according to a study from the Shorenstein Center at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, traffic at many of their websites has been flat.

And yet, for all their troubles, most newspapers continued to make money in the past year. In the first nine months of 2008, according to the *American Journalism Review*'s John Morton, newspapers' average operating profit margins were running at 11.5 percent. That is down from a peak of 22.3 percent in 2002, but it is still quite respectable.

Some critics of the companies wonder why they cannot adjust to lower profits and make do. The trouble is that the declines in print circulation and advertising are virtually certain to continue, and if newspapers try to maintain the size and the scope of their operations, they may not be able make any profit even when the recession is over. Nor is it clear that they can cut deep enough fast enough while retaining enough readers to be profitable.

Unsatisfied that the industry has any answer, investors drove down the stocks of newspaper companies in the past year by more than 80 percent on average. In some cases management bears a large share of blame, because the companies borrowed heavily to make acquisitions despite all the signs of trouble ahead. There are certainly some made-to-order villains: the real-estate mogul Sam Zell bought and wrecked the Tribune Company in remarkably little time. But the collapse extends across the entire industry, and many papers are now for sale at rock-bottom prices without any takers.

Among many journalists as well as investors, the hope has vanished that newspapers as we have known them can make the transition to a world of hybrid print-online publication. Like network TV news and weekly newsmagazines, newspapers have been living off aging audiences that acquired their media habits in earlier decades. A few years ago, it seemed that they could rely on that aging print readership to tide them over until revenue began gushing from the Web. But online ads still account for only 8 percent of ad sales, and their growth has stalled just as earnings from print have tumbled. The result is that newspapers are shrinking not just physically or in labor power, but in the most important dimension of all—their editorial mission.

The predominant response in the industry to rising financial pressures has been to concentrate editorial resources close to home. At many papers, foreign coverage was one of the first things to go: the number of American newspaper

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correspondents abroad dropped 30 percent between 2002 and 2006. In 2004, a study by the Pew Project on Excellence in Journalism found that front-page stories about foreign affairs accounted for "the lowest total in any year we have ever studied." In a new Pew study in 2008, based on a large survey of news executives, two-thirds said their papers had reduced space for foreign coverage in the previous three years. During that same period, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Baltimore Sun*, and *The Boston Globe* shuttered their last foreign bureaus. Meanwhile, network TV news divisions have also closed bureaus abroad—CBS, which once had twenty-four foreign bureaus, now has six—further shrinking the number of American sources for foreign news.

Some may say not to worry. After all, even as American newspapers and TV networks eliminate foreign correspondents, the Internet provides easy access to foreign news media such as the BBC and the websites of international organizations. But availability is not tantamount to exposure. The average reader who might have learned about world events in a local paper or on the evening news is probably not going to search out foreign news sites on the Internet. And it cannot be a good thing that at a time when America's economic and security interests are so entangled with the rest of the world, America's news media are withdrawing from it.

Newspapers around the United States are also pulling back their coverage of Washington. The Newhouse and Copley bureaus have closed, and McClatchy has cut the number of its Washington reporters in half. When the Tribune Company combined the Washington bureaus of the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and its other papers, it reduced the total editorial staff by two thirds. Cox Newspapers, which used to have thirty reporters in the capital for *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and its sixteen other papers, is shutting down its Washington bureau in April.

Just as there are other sources for international news, so there are other sources of Washington coverage—but journalists from regional papers perform a special service for their readers, monitoring their representatives in Congress and reporting on federal programs from a local angle. Washington reporters for *The San Diego Union-Tribune* won a Pulitzer Prize in 2006 for exposing the corruption of Rep. Randall ("Duke") Cunningham. That bureau is now shut.

The watchdog role of the regional press is even more critical at the state level, where no one else is likely to step in when newspapers cut back. Consider my home state of New Jersey. With thirteen full-time reporters in Trenton, the state capital, Newark's *Star-Ledger* in 2000 had the largest statehouse bureau of any newspaper in the country. That commitment of resources reflected the paper's statewide circulation-building strategy, and it fulfilled a public-service mission. "It seemed to us, or it did to me," Jim Willse, the paper's editor, told the *American Journalism Review* in 2000, "that it's a very important role for a statewide newspaper to look at how public money is spent, how departments are functioning, because nobody else is doing it."

But after its 45 percent cut in staff last October, *The Star-Ledger* had just four reporters in Trenton instead of thirteen. Several weeks later, Gannett, which has six papers in New Jersey, reduced its statehouse reporters from six to two. *The New York Times* had already eliminated its three-person Trenton bureau. Altogether, according to the governor's office, the number of full-time statehouse reporters in New Jersey has fallen from more than fifty to fifteen in the past decade. That is a lot fewer pairs of eyes to keep watch over state agencies.

Other states have seen the same trend. In the annals of corruption, Illinois has lately been giving New Jersey some tough competition, but, according to Tom Massey, secretary of the Capitol Press Room in Springfield, the number of full-time statehouse reporters in Illinois has dropped from thirty-two to twenty-four in the past three years. A national survey in 2000 counted 543 reporters covering state governments as a full-time job. By 2007, according to Capitolbeat, the association of state capitol reporters, that number was down to 407—and it "will be drastically lower" in a new survey currently under way, Tiffany Shackelford, executive director of Capitolbeat, predicts. "I'm bracing for the worst. Out of our fourteen-member board, three have lost their jobs in the last four months." Nor is it likely that for-profit online news will soon fill the gap in statehouse coverage. The Politicker Network of state news sites was shut down by its owner, Jared Kushner's Observer Media Group, in December and January.

The concern about statehouse coverage—indeed, about newspaper retrenchment in general—is not just the declining number of reporters, but deterioration in the quality of journalism. As the editorial ranks are thinned, internal checks on accuracy are being sacrificed. As reporters with years of experience are laid off, newspapers are losing the local knowledge and relationships with trusted sources that those reporters had built up, which enabled them to break important stories. The reporters that were let go by *The Star-Ledger*—as one of them, Dunstan McNichol, recently recalled for me—had been involved in exposing malfeasance in the state's school construction finance agency, a state medical school, and the privatization of the state's motor vehicle inspection system. In November, I was talking with a group of state judges about the potential ramifications of the newspaper crisis when one of them observed ruefully that the reporter from *The Star-Ledger* who had covered the courts for two decades, and done an excellent job of it, had taken a buyout. "She knows where all the bodies are buried," the judge said, no doubt intending the phrase as a metaphor, though in some places in New Jersey he might have had to think twice about being taken literally.

Besides cutting back foreign, national, and state coverage, newspapers are also reducing space devoted to science and the arts, and laying off science and medical reporters, music critics, and book reviewers. But there is one type of coverage that newspapers have tried to protect, at least in the early phases of cutbacks. According to the 2008 Pew survey of news executives, they have devoted more resources to local news. The case for "hyperlocalism," as it is known, is that newspapers enjoy comparative advantage as sources of information about their immediate communities. But this strategy may not work commercially if it means moving downmarket. The less coverage of the wider world and cultural life that newspapers provide, the more they stand to lose readership among the relatively affluent who have those interests, and the less attractive newspapers will be to many advertisers. Hyperlocalism may be just a short step from hollowing out the news-

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room to the point where most newspapers come to resemble the free tabloids distributed at supermarkets rather than the newspapers of the past.

Newspapers are also adopting other desperate measures, despite their clear potential for creating a self-reinforcing cycle of decline. In a highly publicized move, Detroit's two newspapers, which are operated jointly, have cut home delivery to Thursday, Friday, and Sunday; on the other four days a week, besides being online, the newspapers now appear in a slimmed-down edition available only at newsstands. This seems a good way to push many regular print subscribers to go online for news, where they may find alternatives to the local papers and never come back. Advertisers, too, will get a nudge toward using other alternatives. Still, other "daily papers" may also stop publishing daily on paper, and the weekend may become the last stand of print. Perhaps it is a sign of things to come that *The New York Times* is now promoting a weekend-only home subscription.

For nearly all newspapers, eliminating the print edition entirely and appearing solely online would be suicidal at this point. According to calculations by Pew's Rosenstiel, they might save 40 percent of their costs, but they would lose more than 90 percent of their income. As a last resort, some could stop publishing in print and maintain a skeletal presence on the Web, but most have such heavy debts, pension obligations, and other legacy costs that they probably cannot take that step, except through bankruptcy. One newspaper, *The Christian Science Monitor*, has dropped its print edition and is now available only online, but the *Monitor* is a special case—it has no local market, and it is financed by a church.

Newspaper closures in the twentieth century left monopolies city by city. In some metropolitan areas that still have second or third dailies, that process is likely to play out again—in Denver, for example, where the *Rocky Mountain News* is widely expected to be shut down this spring, and in Seattle, where the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* may soon have its final edition. But not long from now, some major cities will lose their last daily, and no one knows what the effects will be. The sites that develop online probably will not look like the "fat" metros that have brought together so many diverse interests in a single publication. More likely a variety of specialized online sites will cater to different interests. If there is no online successor to the old daily paper, perhaps the websites for local TV or radio stations will provide general community news, but those websites probably will not have as extensive coverage or as broad an audience as the daily paper used to have.

This process is also likely to play out in cities where newspapers survive but can no longer operate at their former scale or scope. Many of the functions that were bundled together in the newspaper are being unbundled online. But if the emerging media environment favors niche journalism, how will public-service journalism be able to reach and influence the broad public that newspapers have had? There is no going back to the way things used to be. If independent news media capable of holding government accountable are going to flourish, they are going to have to do so in the new world of the news, not the one that used to exist.

IV.

After the dot-com bust, the effusive talk about the miracles of the information revolution thankfully went out of style. But the social transformation under way—and there ought to be no doubt that one is indeed underway—is breaking up old monopolies of communication and power and creating new possibilities for free expression and democratic politics. As in any upheaval, some effects are unanticipated, and not all of them are positive, and what is perhaps most confusing, the good and bad are often intertwined.

By vastly increasing the options for diversion as well as information, the Internet has extended a process that had already begun when cable began increasing the number of TV channels. And if the political scientist Markus Prior is right, that expansion of choice is partly responsible for one of the most worrisome trends in American life: diminished attention to the news and reduced engagement in civic life among a significant part of the public.

In the early decades of television up to the 1970s, as Prior reminds us in his book *Post-Broadcast Democracy*, the three networks virtually had a captive audience when they broadcast the evening news at the same time. Although many people coming home from work might have preferred entertainment, they watched the national news with Walter Cronkite or Chet Huntley and David Brinkley and they learned something about politics and world events. As cable and then satellite television developed, however, viewers were able to make choices that corresponded more closely to their preferences. According to Prior, a large group, perhaps three out of ten viewers, fled the news for entertainment programs, while a smaller number, perhaps one of every ten, began watching more news and political discussion now that they had access to Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC.

The result, Prior's data shows, has been an increased disparity in political knowledge between the news drop-outs and the news junkies. Moreover, the character of the public changed. The viewers who gave up news for entertainment tended to have little or no attachment to party, while the news junkies tended to be strong partisans—and so the audience for news has become more partisan than it used to be. Cable news programs with a sharp ideological slant have responded to this shift, and perhaps contributed to it.

The decline of newspapers and the growth of the Internet as a source of news may have a similar impact. On the one hand, there is likely to be less incidental learning among those with low political interest. Like the entertainment-oriented TV viewers who learned about the world because they had no alternative except to sit through the national network news, many people who have bought a paper for the sports, the recipes, the comics, or the crossword puzzle have nonetheless learned something about the wider world because they have been likely at least to scan the front page. Online, by contrast, they do not necessarily see what would be front-page news in their city, and so they are likely to become less informed about news and politics as the reading of newspapers drops. On the other hand, just as more partisan viewers have more to watch on cable than on network television, so partisans have more to read and to discuss online than in the typical local newspaper. As a result, to the extent that the Internet replaces newspapers as a source of news, it may add to the tendencies that Prior has identified—greater disparities in knowledge between news dropouts and news junkies, as well as greater ideological polarization in both the news-attentive public and the news media.

But there is another side to the story. As Yochai Benkler argues in his brilliant book *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*, the new "networked information economy" has some critical advantages for realizing democratic values. The old "industrial model" mass media have required large investments of capital and provided a platform to speak to the public for a relatively small number of people, but now the falling costs of computers and communication have "placed the material means of information and cultural

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production in the hands of a significant fraction of the world's population—on the order of a billion people around the globe." Instead of being confined to a passive role, ordinary people can talk back to the media or circumvent them entirely and enter the public conversation.

The new public sphere, in Benkler's view, is also developing mechanisms for filtering information for reliability and relevance, organizing it into easily navigated paths, and raising it to higher levels of public debate, contrary to critics who have worried that the Internet would be a chaotic Babel or a polarized system of "echo chambers" (as Cass Sunstein argued in his book *Republic.com*). And, unlike the old mass media, the new digital environment facilitates decentralized individual and cooperative action, often organized on an open and voluntary basis. Benkler invests a great deal of hope in this type of non-market collaborative production—the kind that has generated new social media such as Wikipedia, which, amazingly, despite being an encyclopedia, has also become an important news medium because it is so rapidly updated.

Of course, some of these innovations are mixed blessings: people can now share their misinformation as well as their knowledge. Viral email, Twitter, and social network sites can be used to spread rumors and malice through channels hidden from the wider public and insulated from criticism. Benkler is right about the many important gains from new technology, but he does not adequately balance the gains against the losses that the emerging networked economy is also bringing about—among them the problems that Prior identifies, such as the diminished share of the public following the news, and perhaps most important, the toll on the institutions of professional journalism.

Until recently, the Internet seemed primarily to be additive, vastly enlarging the opportunities for self-expression and public debate, while newspapers and other old media continued serving their old functions, such as financing the bulk of original reporting for the general public. That assumption of a happy complementarity no longer holds. By superseding the role of the newspaper as a local market intermediary, the Internet has undercut the economic foundations of the press. No doubt this is a gain in efficiency, because advertisers no longer have to pay monopoly prices to newspapers and can now use cheaper alternatives like free ads on Craigslist. But there is also a cost to democratic values, as newspapers lose their ability to cross-subsidize public-service journalism. The lush profits that enabled them to produce news as a public good are disappearing.

News distributed to the public is a public good in two respects. First, from a political standpoint, news contributes to a well-functioning society inasmuch as it enables the public to hold government and other institutions accountable for their performance. Second, news is a public good in the sense economists use that concept. When someone consumes a box of chocolates, no one else can have them, but that is not true of news. The news itself is never really "consumed" at all, which is why anyone can pass on news to those who have not paid for it—and in the digital environment, information is so easily and instantly passed on that news is, in a sense, even more of a public good than it has ever been. (Copyright protects only the form of expression, not the information itself.)

Markets under-produce public goods because private incentives are insufficient to generate as much production of those goods as there would be if all those who derived a benefit from them had to pay. Still, for a long time, thanks largely to their role as market intermediaries, newspapers have been able to produce this particular public good—newsworthy information, necessary to hold government accountable—on a commercial basis. And that way of getting around the problem of financing news for the general public is now coming to an end.

The non-market collaborative networks on the Web celebrated by Benkler represent an alternative way of producing information as a public good. Before Wikipedia was created, hardly anyone supposed it would work as well as it has. But it has severe limitations as a source of knowledge. Its entries, including news items, are rewritten from other sources, and it does not purport to offer original research or original reporting. The blogosphere and the news aggregators are also largely parasitic: they feed off the conventional news media. Citizen journalists contribute reports from the scene of far-flung events, but the reports may just be the propaganda of self-interested parties.

Voluntary networks cannot easily duplicate certain critical advantages that large-scale and professionally run media have had—the financial wherewithal to invest in trained reporters and editors and to assign them to beats and long projects, and a well-established system of professional norms that has been a source of conscientious motivation and restraint in the reporting of news. The new social media add value when they are a supplement to professional journalism. To the extent that they supplant it, however, the wildfires of rumor and malice will be harder to check.

Nearly a century ago, in *Liberty and the News*, Walter Lippmann wrote:

> The news of the day as it reaches the newspaper office is an incredible medley of fact, propaganda, rumor, suspicion, clues, hopes, and fears, and the task of selecting and ordering that news is one of the truly sacred and priestly offices in a democracy. For the newspaper is in all literalness the bible of democracy, the book out of which a people determines its conduct. It is the only serious book most people read. It is the only book they read every day.

Of course, the day is long gone when anyone would seriously claim the newspaper was the bible of democracy or that their editors exercise a priestly power. But the job of separating rumor from fact remains just as vital as it ever was. Although daily journalism may be losing its economic foundation, it has not lost its justification.

V.

And this returns us to the central problem. If newspapers are no longer able to cross-subsidize public-service journalism and if the de-centralized, non-market forms of collaboration cannot provide an adequate substitute, how is that work going to be paid for? The answer, insofar as there is one, is that we are going to need much more philanthropic support for journalism than we have ever had in the United States.

When a society requires public goods, the solution is often to use government to subsidize them or to produce them directly. But if we want a press that is independent of political control, we cannot have government sponsoring or bailing out specific papers. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, besides using printing contracts to subsidize favored party organs, the federal government supported the press in what First Amendment lawyers today would call a "viewpoint-neutral" way—through cheap postal rates that were available to all newspapers. And since the 1960s, both the federal and state governments have aided public broadcasting, which has enabled public TV and radio stations to become important sources of news.

Public radio has been a particularly notable success. In a period when com-

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mercial radio stations have abandoned all but headline news, National Public Radio has become the last refuge of original reporting on the dial. But as Charles Lewis, a long-time leader in investigative reporting, has pointed out in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, public radio stations, for all their excellent work, have not done a lot of investigative stories. The dependence of many local stations on state government funding makes them vulnerable to political pressure and unlikely to fill the void left by the decline in newspaper coverage of the states. Virtually any proposal for government subsidies of the press today would likely fail on just these grounds: funding by the federal government or the states has too much potential for political manipulation. Elsewhere governments are subsidizing the press. In an effort to aid newspapers in France, President Nicolas Sarkozy recently announced a program to give eighteen-year-olds a free yearlong subscription to a daily paper of their choice. In America this would be a joke, though depending on how many teenagers chose one of our racier tabloids, it could give added meaning to the concept of a "stimulus package."

The other standard means of supporting the production of public goods is through private non-profit organization. In fact, non-profit support of journalism has recently been increasing. But much of the discussion about non-profit journalism has failed to recognize that it can mean at least three different things. The first, though not necessarily the most relevant, is the conversion of newspapers from commercial to non-profit status as a way of preserving their public-service role. Florida's *St. Petersburg Times*, which is owned by a journalism school, the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, is often mistakenly cited as a model for this approach. In fact, the *Times* itself has been run at a profit, which has been used to build up the Poynter Institute into a major center for training in journalism. Today, however, the question is not whether to use a money-making newspaper to support philanthropy, but whether non-profit organizations can sustain newspapers that may be losing money. Britain's Guardian Media Group, owned by the Scott Trust, comes closer to present demands. The trust uses profits from its money-making media subsidiaries to ensure the survival of the daily *Guardian*, which has lost money in recent years. But the *Guardian* model depends on having profitable subsidiaries to offset losses in a daily paper.

Before stopping the presses for the last time, the owners of some declining newspapers may try to convert them into non-profits in the hope of raising contributions to keep them in operation. I would not be surprised if some papers do have a devoted core of readers who would be willing to give more in tax-deductible contributions than they currently pay in subscriptions. But no paper has yet tested whether this option could raise enough money to stay in business.

Besides full non-profit operation of a newspaper, a second approach is philanthropic support of specific kinds of journalism, available through multiple outlets, whether they are commercial or non-profit. The best-known example of this solution is ProPublica, which describes itself as "an independent, non-profit newsroom that produces investigative journalism in the public interest." Publishing online as of last June, ProPublica also works in partnership on some stories with newspapers such as *The New York Times*. The partnerships enable newspapers to keep down the costs of investigative stories, and they give ProPublica access to mass distribution as well as a check on quality. Similarly, the Kaiser Family Foundation, which focuses on health policy, announced last fall that it would begin directly employing reporters to create a health policy news service. According to Drew Altman, Kaiser's president, besides making some stories freely available to newspapers and online, the news service will establish partnerships with newspapers for specific stories, which the papers will then have the right to release first. Some other foundations that focus on specific areas of policy may follow this approach as a way to promote public awareness of their concerns.

Both the non-profit operation of newspapers and the philanthropic subsidy of particular types of reporting are aimed at fostering forms of public-service journalism that would otherwise be in jeopardy. But there is yet a third use of non-profits—and it is for underwriting new models of journalism in the online environment. A good example of this approach is the Center for Independent Media, which, according to its director David Bennahum, receives about $4 million annually from seventy funders to support online political news sites in five states as well as one for national news, *The Washington Independent*. Bennahum says that "the narrative voice of newspapers is not what [online] readers want" and that the sites his center finances are instead doing a kind of journalism that brings readers into dialogue.

The notion that the digital medium requires a more inclusive relationship with the "people formerly called the audience" is a common theme among online journalists. Joshua Micah Marshall, the founder of *TalkingPointsMemo.com*, which runs on a commercial basis, says that many of the stories on his site grow out of ideas and tips supplied by readers in thousands of emails daily. Any news operation has information flowing in and out; an online publication can productively open up this process to anyone who is able and prepared to help. Stories develop online incrementally, often through participation in a collaborative network, rather than being written behind the scenes and released only when checked and finished. This is entirely different from "citizen journalism," and has the potential to be just as rigorous as traditional journalistic practices.

In cities around the country, journalists are experimenting with a variety of strategies for building up Web-only news sites to make up for the shrinking newsrooms of local papers. *MinnPost.com* in Minneapolis-St. Paul, the most substantial of these ventures, hopes to attract a wide range of readers and sponsors with news coverage of relatively broad scope, according to its CEO and editor Joel Kramer. But its annual budget of $1.3 million cannot support an operation on the scale of a metropolitan daily; with only seven full-time staff, *MinnPost.com* relies primarily on freelancers, many of them journalists who have left St. Paul's *Pioneer Press* or Minneapolis's *Star-Tribune* (which in January filed for bankruptcy protection despite having cut its editorial staff by 25 percent). Another non-profit online metropolitan news site, the *VoiceofSanDiego.org*, developed as a response to scandals in the city and has specialized in investigative stories. Like public radio, these ventures raise money through individual membership contributions and grants from local foundations, though not from government.

Doubtful that they can ever achieve the scale of the big metros, Rosenstiel compares the Web-based city news sites to aggressive city magazines. If one major concern is keeping government accountable, that kind of aggressive reporting is certainly a valuable function and well worth supporting. But owing to their more limited economic basis, the non-profit news sites are unlikely to be able to offer the coverage, or to exert the influence, of a daily newspaper read by half the people in a city. The great metros did not emerge just because cities needed newspapers to inform citizens—

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after all, cities need lots of things that they are never able to develop. Newspapers flourished at the metropolitan level because their role as local market intermediaries enabled them to generate substantial advertising as well as circulation income and thereby to become strong and independent. Non-profit news sites that lack a strong advertising base depend on donors for their survival and are at risk of being destroyed by a single lawsuit, and so they are unlikely to be able to match the traditional power of the press.

Many people have been expecting the successors of newspapers to emerge on the Web. But there may be no successor, at least none like the papers we have known. The metropolitan daily may be a peculiar historical invention whose time is passing. We may be approaching not the end of newspapers, but the end of the age of newspapers—the long phase in history when newspapers published in major cities throughout the United States have been central to both the production of news and the life of their metropolitan regions.

Metropolitan newspapers have dominated news gathering, set the public agenda, served as the focal point of controversy, and credibly represented themselves as symbolizing and speaking for the cities whose names they have carried. They have tried to be everyone's source of news, appealing across the ideological spectrum, and to be comprehensive, providing their readers with whatever was of daily interest to them. Some newspapers, a smaller number than exist today, will survive the transition to the Web, but they probably will not possess the centrality, the scope, or the authoritative voice—much less the monopolies on metropolitan advertising—that newspapers have had.

The news media emerging in the digital environment seem likely to be more concentrated in some respects and more fragmented in others. Readership is already becoming concentrated in a national press. *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post* seem well-positioned to capitalize on the abandonment of international, national, and cultural coverage by regional newspapers. The likely closing of some papers, or their retreat from daily to weekend print publication, should only intensify this shift. In Europe, the press has long been dominated by national papers; now American newspapers are moving in that direction.

Another form of likely news-media concentration has no precedent or parallel. Online, the old divisions among types of media are breaking down. Instead of just offering text, newspapers have begun providing audio and video, and—despite current federal regulations limiting cross-ownership—it seems just a matter of time before there are full-fledged combinations of newspapers and the news divisions of broadcast networks and stations. Even if we call some of these combinations "newspapers," they will be an entirely different species.

Yet the emerging news media also seem likely to become more fragmented by interest and partisanship. Just as the national press of European countries is typically split along ideological lines, so our emerging national media are taking on distinct ideological profiles. And as many traditional functions of newspapers are hived off into specialized sites, more of the news we read will be the work of decentralized networks rather than single, large-scale news organizations.

For those with the skills and interest to take advantage of this new world of news, there should be much to be pleased with. Instead of being limited to a local paper, such readers already enjoy access to a broader range of publications and discussions than ever before. But without a local newspaper or even with a shrunken one, many other people will learn less about what is going on in the world. As of now, moreover, no source in any medium seems willing and able to pay for the general-interest reporting that newspapers are abandoning. Philanthropy can help to offset some of these cutbacks, but it is unlikely to make up fully for what we are losing.

News coverage is not all that newspapers have given us. They have lent the public a powerful means of leverage over the state, and this leverage is now at risk. If we take seriously the notion of newspapers as a fourth estate or a fourth branch of government, the end of the age of newspapers implies a change in our political system itself. Newspapers have helped to control corrupt tendencies in both government and business. If we are to avoid a new era of corruption, we are going to have to summon that power in other ways. Our new technologies do not retire our old responsibilities. ◆

Adam Kirsch
IN THE WORD-HOARD

STEPPING STONES: INTERVIEWS WITH SEAMUS HEANEY
By Dennis O'Driscoll
(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 522 pp., $32)

"Remote on the one hand from the banal, on the other from the eccentric, his genius was calculated to win at once the adhesion of the general public and the admiration, both sympathetic and stimulating, of the connoisseur." So writes Thomas Mann about Gustav von Aschenbach, great writer and national institution, in *Death in Venice*; and the description applies unexpectedly well to Seamus Heaney. Heaney is in obvious ways unlike Mann's Apollonian aesthete, but he too has managed to win the love of the many and the esteem of the few, in a way that no American poet since Frost has managed. As Heaney observes in this important book-length interview, designed to serve in lieu of a memoir, "In the United States, there's a great crop of ripe, waving poetry—but there's no monster hogweed sticking up out of it." But he has always been that hogweed in the small but teeming field of Irish poetry, and for the past forty years Heaney has led the richly burdened existence of the responsible artist.

"What I've said before, only half in joke, is that everybody in Ireland is famous," Heaney modestly remarks in *Stepping Stones*. "Or, maybe better say everybody is familiar. Since I was a schoolboy, I've been used to being recognized on the road by old and young, and being bantered with and indeed being taunted." But of course few people in Ireland are as familiar with fame as Heaney; and few poets, in an age when poetry is benignly neglected across the English-speaking world, have so conscientiously integrated their public and poetic selves. Near the end of the book, Dennis O'Driscoll—an excellent poet and critic, and a deeply informed and probing interviewer of his longtime friend—asks Heaney about the publication history of "Anything Can Happen," a post–September 11 poem based on a Horatian ode. Before it was included in his most recent book, *District and Circle*, the poem "appeared first in *The Irish Times*; then you introduced it in a lecture to the Royal

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College of Surgeons and published it in *Translation Ireland*; finally you republished it … in a booklet in support of Amnesty International."

The reason for this recycling, Heaney explains, is "ongoing civic service, I suppose. The requests for contributions to different series and different causes is unending." And "for better or worse, I was never a person who preserved myself for my writing. In fact, I do believe that your vocation puts you in line for a certain amount of community service, so to speak." Again Aschenbach comes to mind: "Almost before he was out of high school he had a name. Ten years later he had learned to sit at his desk and sustain and live up to his growing reputation, to write gracious and pregnant phrases in letters that must needs be brief, for many claims press upon the solid and successful man. At forty, worn down by the strains and stresses of his actual task, he had to deal with a daily post heavy with tributes from his own and foreign countries."

Heaney was not yet forty years old when Robert Lowell proclaimed him "the best Irish poet since W. B. Yeats," but already he was no stranger to anointings. The oldest of nine children, he grew up on a farm in Northern Ireland, and the labors and pleasures of that rural life have been an inexhaustible subject for his verse. At the age of twelve, Heaney was sent off to a Catholic boarding school, St. Columb's College, whereupon "I shifted," he recalls, "into a kind of separateness, but also a kind of privilege." "I was being 'educated,' and that meant being set a bit apart."

The separateness would only deepen as his career progressed. In 1965, Heaney's first collection, *Death of a Naturalist*, was accepted by Faber and Faber, the premier publisher of poetry in the English language. At twenty-six, he had vaulted past his Northern Irish contemporaries, talented poets such as Michael Longley and Derek Mahon, to join a list that included Eliot and Auden. In 1975, *North*, his collection of poems inspired by Northern Ireland's Troubles, made his name known across the English-speaking world. In 1982 he received the first of his many honorary degrees and became a professor at Harvard. At every stage, life vindicated the intuition of giftedness that he expresses in "The Diviner," a poem from his first book:

> The bystanders would ask to have a try.
> He handed them the rod without a word.
> It lay dead in their grasp till, nonchalantly,
> He gripped expectant wrists. The hazel stirred.

By the time Heaney won the Nobel Prize in 1995, he had long experience of the "claims [that] press upon the solid and successful man." Perhaps the most intriguing thing about Heaney, however, is how completely impossible it is to imagine him finally cracking under this burden of responsibility, the way Aschenbach so spectacularly does. When Heaney learned that he had won the Nobel Prize, he relates in *Stepping Stones*, he was away in Greece, in the sensual south—not with any Tadzio, but with Marie, his wife of thirty years and the addressee of his moving, unillusioned love poems. (When his son told him the news over the phone, the first thing he said was, "You'd better tell your mother.") And he encountered the prize not as a holiday, but as another onrush of obligations: "I was in a sweat, literally and figuratively. I couldn't think clearly, because suddenly there were a dozen things to be done."

This is a truly Mann-like response to fame: the supreme conscientiousness, the duty to art and nation coming before egoistic pleasure. Mann would certainly have appreciated the image of writerly obligation that Heaney offers in "Weighing In":

> And this is all the good tidings amount to:
> This principle of bearing, bearing up
> And bearing out, just having to
>
> Balance the intolerable in others
> Against our own, having to abide
> Whatever we settled for and settled into
>
> Against our better judgment. Passive
> Suffering makes the world go round.

Yet Mann's suffering was never totally passive, for he took revenge in his work on the "principle of bearing" that made the work possible. His fictional avatars are always collapsing under their self-imposed burdens—contracting a deadly illness, or falling in love with exotic women or boys, or committing suicide. As a result, the outward respectability of Mann's own life came to seem like the most exquisite irony of all. Goodness, he seems to suggest by example, is a role, even a pretense. The more admirable the writer, the more costly his concealment.

The strength—and the enigma—of Heaney's work is that he never distances himself from his own goodness in this way. The responsibilities that he has sought or accepted over a long life—as son, husband, father, artist, Catholic, Irish national conscience—are the major subject of his verse; but if they are weights, they are never intolerable ones. They are rather, as another image from "Weighing In" has it, like the weights on a balance:

> the immovable
> Stamp and squat and square-root of dead weight.
> Yet balance it
>
> Against another one placed on a weighbridge—
> On a well-adjusted, freshly greased weighbridge—
> And everything trembled, flowed with give and take.

This desire to hold, or to be, the balance between competing claims and impulses can be seen in every phase of Heaney's work. It is present, to take a small but significant example, in the titles of his major critical works, the two lecture series published as *The Redress of Poetry* and *The Government of the Tongue*. Other poets would have used "and" in those titles, to emphasize the tension between redress and poetry, government and the tongue—both of them restatements of the pair of opposites Yeats called "reality and justice." "They have helped me to hold in a single thought reality and justice" was Yeats's justification for the mystical schemes of *A Vision*, and the obsessive, outlandish detail of his system is an index of how much pressure it took to keep those opposites yoked together.

For Heaney, however, the "and" of tension gives way to the "of" of reconciliation. The golden tongue of the poet, one might suppose, is helpless before the leaden weight of power—as Heaney acknowledges, "In one sense the efficacy of poetry is nil—no lyric has ever stopped a tank." But he goes on to insist that "in another sense, it is unlimited. It is like the writing in the sand in the face of which accusers and accused are left speechless and renewed." The allusion is to the moment in the New Testament when Jesus, confronting a crowd that wants to stone a woman taken in adultery, "stooped down, and wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not," before issuing the challenge, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." We do not know what Jesus was writing on the ground—nor, Heaney implies, does it matter. What matters is the fact of writing, which like poetry "holds attention for a space, functions not as distraction but as pure concentration, a focus where

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our power to concentrate is concentrated back on ourselves."

Heaney's parable attempts to recover for poetry the ethical, even political force that Auden famously denied it when he wrote that "poetry makes nothing happen." Heaney is much too experienced a man to believe that poetry can make something happen. But instead of lamenting poetry's nothingness, he chooses to redeem it through metaphor, turning it into an empty "space," a "focus," where it can produce spiritual—which is to say, actual—effects. This is perhaps the best case that can still be made for the edifying value of art. And it proceeds, in typically Heaneyesque fashion, not by weighing in on either side of an old antithesis—the beautiful versus the good—but by reconciling them in a tentative synthesis: beauty sponsors goodness. Heaney admires Czesław Miłosz, he tells O'Driscoll, because "his intellect wasn't forced to choose between 'perfection of the life or of the work'—it was forced to meld them." In his sense of the reconcilability of poetry with goodness, Heaney is perhaps Miłosz's greatest disciple.

Yet it is possible to admire the nobility and the ingenuity of Heaney's reconciliations without completely assenting to them. Does poetry really have the function of "concentrating" us on ourselves, of shocking us out of our prejudices the way Jesus shocked the stone-throwers? (And is that, in fact, what the Gospel story describes?) Do we return from "To Autumn," or "Lycidas," or "The Emperor of Ice Cream," better equipped to make moral decisions? Consider even a poem explicitly concerned with political ethics, such as Heaney's "Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces," with its famous lines:

> I am Hamlet the Dane,
> skull-handler, parablist,
> smeller of rot
>
> in the state, infused
> with its poisons,
> pinioned by ghosts
> and affections,
>
> murders and pieties,
> coming to consciousness
> by jumping in graves,
> dithering, blathering.

What this poem powerfully does is to capture the confusion and oppression of political violence. It is able to do this because of Heaney's mastery of the seemingly most abstract element of verse, its music: the short lines, with their dense consonants, impede speech the way turmoil impedes thought. What the poem does not do, I think, is help the reader in any way to decide the rights and the wrongs of the particular political situation that inspired it, or of politics in general. The line "dithering, blathering" seems to encapsulate this paradox: almost childishly gratifying to say and hear, it is about being unable to say or to hear anything meaningful, anything useful.

This ultimate disjunction between beauty and goodness is why, as Heaney observes in *Stepping Stones*, "the true aesthete would perceive himself . . . as a subversive." And Heaney is anything but a subversive. Some of the most moving moments in the book are his earnest, unfashionable avowals of the duty of the poet to uphold rather than to deconstruct. "There's a good deal of humour in me, I hope; and I have a kind of sardonic attitude to a lot of things," he says. "But for better or worse, when I sit opposite to the desk, it's like being an altar boy in the sacristy getting ready to go out on the main altar. There's a gravitas comes over me."

The allusion to the church of his boyhood is significant. While Heaney is no longer a believing Catholic, he acknowledges Catholicism as a continuing influence, above all on his sense of the value of "passive suffering": "But the idea that your own travails could earn grace for others, for the souls in purgatory, for instance, was appealing: my mind worked on those lines all right, my sense that there was value in selfless endurance." Indeed, the "discipline" at St. Columb's, "when all's said and done, was essentially a preparation for religious vocation." Even in the more worldly environment of Queen's College, Belfast, Heaney recalls ruefully, "everybody was provided with their own inner priest."

The inner priest survives in Heaney the poet not in any dogma or doctrine, but in his sense that it is his duty to fortify, to offer consolation. His strongest statement of this principle comes in his essay "Joy or Night," where he considers Philip Larkin's exceedingly unconsoling poem "Aubade": "Being brave / Lets no one off the grave. / Death is no different whined at than withstood." Heaney endorses Miłosz's criticism that Larkin has defaulted on the poet's obligation to be "on the side of life." "'Aubade,'" Heaney writes, "does add weight to the negative side of the scale and tips the balance definitely in favor of chemical law and mortal decline. The poem does not hold the lyre up in the face of the gods of the underworld."

Another way of stating Heaney's objection is that he blames Larkin for telling the plain truth about death, rather than wreathing it in metaphor. But what Larkin says about death and the afterlife in "Aubade" is not substantively different from what Heaney himself says in "Clearances," his sequence about the death of his mother: "The space we stood around had been emptied / Into us to keep." Here, as for Larkin, there is no soul and no afterlife, except in the memory of the survivors. What makes "Clearances" seem like a more affirmative poem than "Aubade" is only the metaphor which turns the absence of an empty space into a presence that can be "emptied into us," the way a wine bottle is emptied by pouring out its contents into a cup. Heaney offers what he calls, when discussing a different poem in *Stepping Stones*, "a sensation of 'scope' . . . it's still susceptible to the numinous."

This is the distinction upon which he insists in "Joy or Night": "In order that human beings bring about the most radiant conditions for themselves to inhabit, it is essential that the vision of reality which poetry offers be transformative, more than just a printout of the given circumstances of its time and place." But this interdict against poetry as "a printout" is, no doubt by design, deeply ambiguous. It can be read aesthetically, as an insistence that the language of poetry be heightened from the language of life—that it possess what Heaney calls "forcibleness," "the attribute that makes you feel the lines have been decreed, that there has been no fussy picking and choosing of words but instead a surge of utterance." But it can also be read ethically, as a warning not to set down the truth if the truth is not conducive to "radiance."

The problem with this second interpretation becomes clear in Heaney's Nobel Lecture, "Crediting Poetry" (which appeared in these pages), where he declares:

> Yet there are times when a deeper need enters, when we want the poem to be not only pleasurably right but compellingly wise, not only a surprising variation played upon the world, but a retuning of the world itself. We want the surprise to be transitive, like the impatient thump which unexpectedly restores the picture to the television set, or the electric shock which sets the fibrillating heart back to its proper

ANTHONY RUSSO

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rhythm. We want what the woman wanted in the prison queue in Leningrad, standing there blue with cold and whispering for fear, enduring the terror of Stalin's regime and asking the poet Anna Akhmatova if she could describe it all, if her art could be equal to it.

This is a revealingly partial interpretation of the section "Instead of a Preface" that begins Akhmatova's great sequence "Requiem." For what the suffering woman demands of the poet, during "the terrible years of the Yezhov terror," is simply "Can you describe this?" And Akhmatova's response is simply "I can." There is nothing "transitive" about the poem—no sense that, like a defibrillator, it can correct the mortal ailment it diagnoses. The poem can only tell the truth—or, one might say, offer a "printout" of its horribly wounded "time and place." This is what it means for poetry to be "equal to" evil: not in the sense of an opposing force of equal strength, but in the sense of a candor, a purpose, that does not flinch. Akhmatova describes the stranger's response to her terse affirmative this way: "Then something like a smile passed fleetingly over what had once been her face." It is not unlike the smile that we ourselves might smile when agreeing with Larkin that "death is no different whined at than withstood": the honest but helpless registration of sympathy with a fellow sufferer.

It is very characteristic that Heaney's interpretation of the Akhmatova story rests on this ambiguity in his use of the word "equal." What he intends as a healing reconciliation between the two senses of the word can appear, to a resisting reader, more like an equivocation. At its most extreme, Heaney's desire to "show an affirming flame" leads to writing that he describes, in *Stepping Stones*, as "public in the megaphone sense of the word," like the much-quoted lines from "The Cure at Troy," his translation of Sophocles's *Philoctetes*: "once in a lifetime / The longed-for tidal wave / Of justice can rise up / And hope and history rhyme." This passage was a favorite of Bill Clinton, who alluded to it in the title of his book *Between Hope and History*. Yet Heaney acknowledges that they belong "in the realm of pious aspiration."

In his best and most serious work, however, Heaney is pious in another, more provocative way: he is reverent toward language itself. Near the end of their conversation, O'Driscoll asks Heaney, "What has poetry taught you?" The poet replies with another reconciliation or equivocation: "that poetry itself has virtue, in the first sense of possessing a quality of moral excellence and in the sense also of possessing inherent strength by reason of its sheer madeupness, its *integritas*, *consolantia* and *claritas*." Or, as he puts it in the Nobel Lecture: "The resolution and independence which the entirely realized poem sponsors … has as much to do with the energy released by linguistic fission and fusion, with the buoyancy generated by cadence and tone and rhyme and stanza, as it has to do with the poem's concerns or the poet's truthfulness."

Perhaps only a poet whose capacity for pleasure is as great as his sense of responsibility could place such trust in the convertibility of the ethical and the aesthetic. For as these lines suggest, Heaney's greatest power is not to strengthen and to console—Larkin, precisely because of his hard lucidity, is a more consoling poet—but to celebrate. This, too, can be a kind of sacred task, but it requires the poet to be less a priest than a magus or a shaman—public figures both, except that they have less regard for their audience than for the spirits of nature that inspire them. It makes sense that in *Stepping Stones* Heaney names D.H. Lawrence and Ted Hughes as important early influences. If Heaney has not elaborated a pagan mythology the way those poets did, he certainly shares their rapt attention to things and creatures. His poems, like theirs, often take the form of hymns to the inanimate and insentient: "A Bat on the Road," "Badgers," "Mint."

Both Lawrence and Hughes, too, could have written poems titled "The Guttural Muse," as Heaney did in *Field Work*. Heaney is capable of many registers—he can be courtly, argumentative, or rhetorical as the occasion demands—but his characteristic style, the one that makes his lines so instantly recognizable, creates a chthonic music out of dense consonants and mouthed vowels: "I love this turf-face, / its black incisions, / the cooped secrets / of process and ritual." A key ingredient in this music is the Ulster dialect, even the local place-names, that Heaney makes use of so often and so unapologetically. O'Driscoll asks Heaney about one such line, "Where kesh and loaning finger out to heather": "Did you expect non-Ulster readers to engage in some research or was it your hope that context and cadence would provide sufficient illumination of the meaning?" To which Heaney gives a refreshingly insouciant answer: "I didn't think at all of the reader's problem when I wrote the line. The joy was in solving my own writer's need."

Heaney, in other words, like all great poets, does not hold himself answerable to the reader in the first instance. He serves the reader, to be sure—but by holding himself responsible to his subjects and to his language. This is the process that he describes and enacts in the early poem "Gifts of Rain":

> The tawny guttural water
> spells itself: Moyola
> is its own score and consort,
>
> bedding the locale
> in the utterance.

To make the world spell itself, to turn locale into utterance, is the most fundamental purpose of poetry, and the most joyful. The true significance of Heaney's goodness, it may be, is that by satisfying his conscience, he could shelter the unaccountable space where this transformation happens. He refused to be subversive so that he could permit himself the felicity of the aesthete. Does Heaney not tell us as much in "North"?

> It said, "Lie down
> in the word-hoard, burrow
> the coil and gleam
> of your furrowed brain.…
>
> Keep your eye clear
> as the bleb of the icicle,
> trust the feel of what nubbed treasure
> your hands have known." ◆

The City of Poetry

There are a number of shallow streams
In the city, but only the one river.
Only the one river, but different
Poems give it different names.

For some it's Lethe, river of oblivion;
For others, it's Time itself, that flows
Through all poems, that laps
At the banks of words, slowly eroding.

Some name it after a childhood
Brook—a current that moved
Alongside their own,
As if they both emerged
From the same source.

Others dub it something
Exotic, as if to say: you are a river
I've never seen, except in imagination:
You are the color of my longing,
Which is deep and pure.

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Michael Tomasky

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THE RULES OF THE GAME
By Leonard Downie Jr.
(Alfred A. Knopf, 319 pp., $26.95)

I HAVE THIS IDEA for a great Washington novel. A new president takes office, having prevailed in a gruesomely divisive election. He is muddling through his first few months in office when suddenly a great national calamity strikes. He had theretofore shown few signs that he had it in him to rise to this solemn occasion, but he meets with some initial success. And then, sure enough, it becomes apparent to some keener observers that he and the people around him are exploiting the tragedy for political ends, using said calamity as cover to realize a newly omnipotent executive branch, arrogating to itself vast powers that threaten the constitutional balance, and acting on a set of foreign policy goals that have long been the gleam in the eye of a handful of policy intellectuals but were, until disaster struck, widely considered extreme and even vaguely megalomaniacal. With me so far?

Now here is where it gets interesting. Novelistic convention would dictate that at this point my protagonist, the one who realizes what is really going on, arise from the quotidian muck to brandish the sword of truth and justice. He or she might be a crusading journalist or editor, a government whistleblower, or, in Brockovichian fashion—I'm definitely thinking screenplay!—a grave, busybodyish, but ultimately valiant activist type. But this is where I cast convention to the winds. I have no protagonist. In my opus, Washington meekly goes along.

Yes, there are those who warn about the dangers that wait down such a path of action, but they are marginalized and dismissed as soft-headed pacifists. The city's great newspaper—the same one that once brought down a corrupt president—largely endorses the president's course of action. The salonistes and the hostesses fete the president and his men; the courtiers court and the jesters jest. I am even considering—it may test the credulity of my readers—that I will have Washington's most celebrated investigative journalist produce a book lionizing the president's march to a tragic and ill-considered war.

The administration runs into snags here and there. Indeed, almost everything it touches turn to disaster. Eventually the people recognize this. But in Washington, nothing much happens. Once the president has lost popular support, of course, the tastemakers prove adept at kicking him while he's down, a local skill honed for generations. But basically—no dramatic tension, no plucky heroes, no climactic showdown in which the forces of light prevail. The nation is left in chaos, and the president limps home to a cosseted retirement.

I know what you're thinking: there is not much potential here. And as I read back over my plan, I see that you may have a point. In fact, my agent has intimated as much. Who would want to read that? And who would believe it? People—intelligent and well-meaning people, dedicated to the public weal—are simply not that timorous, are they?

The non-fiction version, I mean the actual historical record, of how Washington acquitted itself in the Bush years is not a flattering story. Congress, the media, the foreign policy establishment—Republicans and Democrats, conservatives and (many) liberals—far too often enabled an administration that will clearly go down in history as one of our most incompetent and mendacious. But fortunately God made novels. And in fiction, people … well, they *are* intelligent, well-meaning, dedicated to the public weal, and simply not that timorous. In novels, they do stand up. Truth, justice, and the American way prevail.

Boy, do they prevail in *The Rules of the Game*, Leonard Downie Jr.'s novel of contemporary Washington. Even the bad guy is good when it counts. Plagued by guilt and shame, he commits suicide, but before doing so he takes care to wrap all the incriminating documents in a nice little package, just like Tim Robbins did in *The Shawshank Redemption*—Downie is definitely thinking screenplay!—so the crusading reporter at "*The Washington Capital*" can spill the beans.

The actual rules of the actual game when Downie was the actual executive editor of the actual *Washington Post* (he stepped down last fall) were, as you may remember, a little different. The *Post* eventually broke some terrific and important stories during the Bush years, Dana Priest's pieces about the CIA's "black sites" in particular. But the paper's well-documented and much-debated failures when it really mattered—in the period when the Bush administration was accumulating all that power and telling us that Saddam Hussein was six months away from being able to take out New York City—make it awfully hard not to read this novel as an exercise in self-absolution.

WASHINGTON NOVELS, whatever their literary shortcomings, usually attempt to capture a particular Washington of a particular time. *The Rules of the Game* does this to a certain literal extent—the plot involves matters such as torture and black sites and furtive lobbyists and shady government contractors and so on—but at its emotional core what it attempts is precisely the opposite: it is a rewriting of the non-fiction history so that everything works out the way it is supposed to work out. A fantasy version of the Bush years, a forgetting of things past, in which, at day's end, the moral decency and high standards of the community win the day, as we flee the power-hungry snares of "the unitary executive."

This is the rare novel about a real danger that has a lulling effect on its reader. It is also an absurdly incredible story lashed to a strangely banal climax. Sarah Page, a young reporter for the aforementioned *Capital*, has been covering Annapolis but is shifted to the national money-and-politics beat. There is a presidential campaign going on, in which the Democrat Monroe Capehart seems poised to win under the guidance of the rock-star consultant Trent Tucker. Page had known Tucker previously, because Tucker had been a consultant to the Democratic governor of Maryland, and the two had even engaged in brief and unsatisfying extramarital sex.

There is also a star political reporter named Mark Daniels, who also engages in brief and unsatisfying extramarital sex, with a Capehart aide. He takes Page under his wing. Meanwhile Capehart names a woman as his running mate—Senator Susan Cameron of California, who had been married to a multimillionaire senator who resigned in disgrace after a scandal involving (you guessed it) extramarital sex. She takes his seat and, despite her inexperience on the national stage, becomes "a red-hot media celebrity." She

Michael Tomasky is the editor of Guardian America, the U.S.-based website of The Guardian.

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delivers a scorcher of a speech at the convention, attacking the GOP candidate Warner Wylie by repeating the refrain, "Where was Wylie?" Here is Ann Richards and Arianna Huffington and Sarah Palin rolled bizarrely into one.

Page is barely two or three months on her new beat when she breaks a big story about Tucker's corporate clients and lobbyist connections, an angle that up to this point had evidently not occurred to any of Washington's most experienced journalists to explore. Page is at the gym—I mean "the well-appointed health club near Washington's Cleveland Park neighborhood"—when a fellow walks up to her in fine Hal Holbrook-style: "It was a good story. But you've only found the tip of the iceberg. There's more, a lot more. And it gets nasty. Very nasty."

So Page follows the money. Her sources start dying in mysterious hit-and-run accidents. She works the local-crime angle with the *Capital*'s police reporter, a black woman who of course calls Page "girlfriend" and so on. Mark Daniels knows that Monroe Capehart is in ill health, but he learns about it in such a way that he cannot print it. Capehart is elected. He attends the White House Correspondents' Dinner about three months after his election. He makes a joke about William Henry Harrison in his speech, and then, in the most extraordinary coincidence, he goes back to the White House and falls over dead. Susan Cameron is president. Trent Tucker attends an orgy in Arlington.

Pretty soon Page is receiving anonymous phone calls at 4 a.m.:

> "You're a political reporter, Miss Page. You should stay away from defense matters. You could make mistakes, serious mistakes."
>
> "I really don't understand." She tried to draw more information out of him. "Where are you calling from? You sound too polite to be making crank calls."
>
> "This is not a crank call, Miss Page. This is serious business. It's about the security of our country."
>
> "What about it?"
>
> "Your reporting, Miss Page. Who you've been talking to. What you've been asking. You need to return to politics, Miss Page."

Scary.

The trail leads back to Tucker, who is enmeshed in some sort of Abramoff-esque web of private companies that engage in some of the rough stuff in Iraq and to non-profit groups that sponsor congressional junkets to help cover it all up. (The novelistic imagination does not exactly run riot in this book.) The fearless Miss Page keeps advancing the story. At a certain point the pushback starts—first from the companies and their lawyers, eventually from the White House. Page is undeterred, and naturally (and somewhat more interestingly), so is the *Capital*'s editor, a swashbuckling principal named Lou Runyon who backs Page, Jason Robards-style, every step of the way. "Get used to the fact that we're going to run this story whether you like it or not," Runyon tells a lawyer.

A few more sources are killed. An attempt is made on Page's life, with a car bomb. She starts having brief and unsatisfying extramarital sex with a congressman who is feeding her information. Her reporting leads her toward the White House and an aide named Elliott Bancroft, toward the corporation that is providing the contract employees—and, of course, toward Tucker. He knows the jig is up, and this is when he kills himself—by, I kid you not, stepping out in front of the motorcade of the head of the Federal Reserve Bank as he heads to the office in the pre-dawn darkness. The *Shawshank* package is left on his dining room table.

On and on it goes, page after page of this stuff. I cannot say that I was gripped, but I was curious about what the deep-dark secret would be. And you know what? It was only the outsourcing of torture. A terrible thing, of course; but a letdown of a secret. We have known about the outsourcing of torture since Abu Ghraib. Couldn't Downie, sitting where he's been sitting these last eight years, have devised some mega-bomb to drop on us, something he had learned at the top of Washington journalism that the rest of us did not know but that he could not in good conscience convey reportorially? A real scoop that demanded real fiction? Anyway, President Cameron announces that she will serve only one term as president, take it upon herself to clean out the stables, set things aright and retire. This is a Washington that has no need of an Obama. It fixes itself. The republic is saved.

The Rules of the Game, with its title's absurd allusion to Jean Renoir, is a pretty lurid paranoid fantasy. Did CACI and Titan, the two chief private contractors in Iraq, really have multiple people in Washington killed? It seems highly unlikely to me, and I am no prude about the Bush era. (Since they have shown a litigious bent, perhaps I should say it seems altogether impossible.) Any student of the modern world knows that sometimes more violence may be perpetrated by memorandum than by car bomb. But car bombs look better on the silver screen.

At the same time, the novel is a heroic re-interpretation of a highly un-heroic period. A woman president was, when Downie was likely conceiving his plot, as good a guess as any; he swung for the zeitgeist fences and missed, but he is not to be blamed for poor powers of divination. Still, a president who willingly gives up the presidency after one term? Yes, I know that Lyndon Johnson did it. But that was long before today's permanent-campaign culture, and Johnson stood down because of the unpopularity of a war that *he* started—not as a matter of honor, but because an election was coming up and he thought he would lose. Downie's Cameron is not responsible for the contractor scandal in any way. More importantly as a literary matter, it might have been more plausible if Downie had taken us inside the mind of President Cameron and shown us her private wrestling match with her conscience. But these people have no insides. This president's moral epiphany is just something that she announces during a State of the Union address, and that's that.

The lack of interior reflection is rather a shortcoming, of course. And so, too, is the novel's style, or lack of one. The writing is newspaper-prose-y, with no irony intended; there is not a single surprising verb or fresh adjective in the entire book. This is fiction as edited by the metro desk. And not a single funny thing ever happens. Is life, even in Washington, really so witless? But here, even in the midst of serious goings-on, nobody cracks a joke (except for a few bromidic newsroom cynicisms), or humorously misreads another's intentions, or bollixes things up in a way that introduces a spot of wryness into the proceedings. I seem to recall that a little humor even penetrated the Karamazov household from time to time.

I will say this on Downie's behalf. The lay reader will learn certain interesting things about how journalists and politicians negotiate the terms of publication of a sensitive journalistic story. Toward the novel's end, there are about three or four passages in which Page and her editors are in the White House talking with officials, sometimes Cameron herself, about whether and how such-and-such a piece of information can be used in a story. These are interesting, and the author assays them with real authority—an authority that does not leap off the pages in the same way elsewhere. I imagined as

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I was reading them that a non-journalist reader who has never given any thought to how such matters are conducted in the lofty precincts could well find them fascinating. Whatever else *The Rules of The Game* is, it is J-school literature.

But now that I have said this very nice thing, there is another matter that annoys me. The names of the characters are so dull. I went through the novel circling the last names: Page, Jones, Daniels, Tucker, Landry, Tawney, Capehart (slightly more inventive, but a real-life colleague of Downey's at the *Post*), Cameron, Winters, Morgan, Phillips, Lawson, Aiken, Malone, Peterson … and then, at last, on page 45, a glimmer of mimesis and a mote of verisimilitude: a Jew! And then on page 240, one more Jew! And that's it, in this knowing novel of big-time Washington journalism and Democratic politics. I'm not saying anything other than that this is not, well, realistic.

Look, there are big problems in this world. Leonard Downie's novel is not one of them. But it is certainly a document of the capital in the years when the capital has much explaining to do, and precious little is explained here. Quite the contrary: the novel is valuable for the fidelity with which it exemplifies the local spirit of complacence and absolution. It is itself the expression of the deeply problematic urge to reach for an airbrush when the writer ought to be firing up a chainsaw. There is a lot of shame to go around concerning the Bush years. Trying to "capture" those years in a novel in which the evil is cartoonish and the good is scarcely credible serves no end, literary or historical. In this spirit, I think I'll drop my novel idea. Downie has scared me away. But what about a novel of Wall Street? A vast mortgage crisis hits, the pillars of American finance are bending and breaking, and a gallant regulator rushes in, after some brief and unsatisfying extramarital sex, to save the American economy just in the nick of time … ◆

Alexander Nemser
VLAD THE IMPALER

VERSES AND VERSIONS: THREE CENTURIES OF RUSSIAN POETRY
Translated by Vladimir Nabokov
Edited by Brian Boyd
and Stanislav Shvabrin
(Harcourt, 441 pp., $40)

I.

Vladimir Nabokov, who throughout his career cultivated his reputation as the most famous literary exile since Ovid, was recognized in his lifetime not only for his novels but also for his authority on Russian cultural and aesthetic matters. He gave packed lectures extolling Tolstoy and annihilating Dostoevsky, and published dozens of translations of Russian verse. This new collection contains translations of lyric and narrative poetry from just after his arrival in America in 1940, when he was most in need of money, through his years of teaching Russian and European literature at Wellesley and Cornell, to his last years in Montreux, where he settled with his family in 1961 after the unexpectedly great success of *Lolita*. Nearly twenty poets are represented, including all the major poets who made up the first great period of Russian verse in the nineteenth century—Pushkin, Lermontov, Tyutchev, Fet—reaching back to the mid-eighteenth century polymath Mikhail Lomonosov, the "godfather of the iambic tetrameter," and forward to the Soviet-era Georgian bard Bulat Okudzhava, who died in Paris in 1997.

In an essay on translating Russian poetry, a famous scholar of Slavic literature once deplored the fashion for translations that retain the meter and the rhyme of the original at the expense of complete semantic fidelity. "As a result," he wrote, "the canned music of rhymed versions is enthusiastically advertised, and accepted, and the sacrifice of textual precision applauded as something rather heroic, whereas only suspicion and bloodhounds await the gaunt, graceless literalist groping around in despair for the obscure word that would satisfy impassioned fidelity and accumulating in the process a wealth of information which only makes the advocates of pretty camouflage tremble or sneer." The scholar's comments present a remarkable indictment of many of Nabokov's translations in *Verses and Versions*, which is full of limply rhymed quatrains and baffling torsions of sense. But the scholar who wrote that article, in 1965, was Vladimir Nabokov.

At a certain point during his career as a translator, Nabokov underwent a violent shift in sensibility—from formal translations in which the meter and the rhyme of the original are preserved but not the exact sense, to literal translations based on word-for-word fidelity. *Verses and Versions* is in part the story of that shift. Owing to the editorial choices, however, the book fails to illustrate vividly what was for Nabokov a momentous renunciation, which put him at odds with much of the literary establishment, and pegged him as an eccentric in the grip of a nostalgic obsession, and set off a bitter and remarkably enduring literary feud between himself and the man who was arguably his closest literary companion.

Nabokov's translations can be divided roughly into two groups: formal translations up to about 1950, and literal translations after 1950. The shift took place while Nabokov was in the process of translating Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, the novel in verse considered to be the greatest poetic accomplishment in the Russian language. Nabokov, fed up with the misleading and inelegant versions of the book he saw all around him, began translating *Onegin* as early as 1945. At first he intended to adhere to the trademark "Onegin Stanza" form (fourteen lines of iambic tetrameter with a specific order of masculine and feminine rhymes) that Pushkin invented, and in which he composed the entire work. But having rendered several stanzas in accordance with the original form, but with multiple additions and flourishes not in the original (the way he had been translating poetry for years before), Nabokov concluded that only a truly literal version would not "traduce the author."

Over the course of the next two decades, during which he published, among other works, *Lolita* and *Pnin*, Nabokov worked intermittently on a scrupulously word-for-word version. He finally published it in 1964, accompanied by a second volume containing five hundred pages of extensive and fastidious notes on everything from the dishes consumed by Pushkin's characters to the dance steps to the exact locations of their strolls (which, Nabokov is careful to note, were some of his own favorite spots as a child). And it was Nabokov's genius to recognize in his own obsessive project the structure for his funniest and most tragic book, *Pale*

Alexander Nemser's poems have been published in The New York Times and The Atlantic.

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Fire, told in the form of a long poem by the invented poet John Shade, followed by hundreds of pages of deranged footnotes to the poem by the scholar Charles Kinbote, who believes himself to be the exiled king of a tiny Eastern European state called Zembla.

About half of *Verses and Versions*, a piecemeal chimera of a book, is composed of translations of lyrics by Pushkin and his contemporaries that can be found among the five hundred pages of commentary to Nabokov's translation of *Onegin*. Then there are the slim volumes of nineteenth-century verse that he prepared for New Directions and Lindsay Drummond; and the excerpts from *Strong Opinions*, his collection of interviews and articles; and the liner notes to an album of arias sung by his son Dmitri. What is new here is a handful of unpublished iambic scraps salvaged from the far-flung Nabokov archives, many of them only a few lines long. Certainly an argument can be made for thoroughness, but must we include everything found in the archives? When the boxes of Isaac Bashevis Singer's archives were opened, half a pastrami sandwich fell out.

Here are few sample stanzas from the book, the first from a humorous poem by Pushkin, translated literally:

> Of the four-foot iambus I've grown
> tired.
> In it writes everyone. To boys this
> plaything
> 'Tis high time to abandon …

The next example, translated similarly according to the original form, is from Mikhail Lermontov (1814-1841), who lived his life in a frenzy, wrote some of the most purely melodic lines in Russian poetry, and died in the Caucasus at the age of twenty-seven in a needless duel which, in accordance with the uncanny ability of Russian poets to predict their own deaths, he had already anticipated in his novel *A Hero of Our Time*:

> Farewell! And be wise, do not grieve:
> our love was too short for regret,
> and hard as we found it to part
> harder still would it be if we met.

And finally, in literal translation, a stanza from a poem addressed to Russia by Aleksandr Blok (1880-1921), the prophetic and hypnotic lyric poet who harbored mystical dreams of the Revolution and died in poverty and disillusionment:

> I know not how to pity you
> but tenderly I carry my cross;
> you may abandon your brigandish
> beauty
> to any wizard you choose.

I can imagine three sets of readers for *Verses and Versions*: people interested in Nabokov, people interested in Russian literature, and—these may be hit the hardest—people interested in poetry. The first group, presumably coming to the book because of their admiration for Nabokov's prose, will be dismayed to encounter pages and pages of dull constructions and lackluster diction. Nabokov's novels, enjoyed for their linguistic virtuosity, induce at their best the sensation of being taken in by the work of a rare illusionist. *Verses and Versions*, by contrast, produces the discomfiting feeling of watching a Houdini promise to escape from an iron safe wrapped in chains and submerged in a tank of water, and then get tangled in his own chains until he barely makes it to the surface before he drowns. So this group of readers will have to make due with a few signature lines from Nabokov's brief introductions to each poet (Baron Anton Antonovich Delvig "curiously combined the classical strain and the folksy one, the amphora and the samovar …"). For those concerned with Nabokov as a translator, this volume is a bonanza of yesterday's mashed potatoes. The best antidote for them would be to go and re-read *Pale Fire*.

For the second set of readers, the ones interested in Russian literature hoping for a representative selection of Russian poetry, the book is also disappointing. Nabokov's choice of what to translate was guided by the demands of specific projects or incidental concerns, and as a result the full constellation of themes and voices, so bright and unique in Russian poetry, is lost. Instead the reader is presented with a cache of bizarre, monotonous, and tepid lyrics whose relation to each other is obscure at best. This is too bad, because the tiny group of plaintive men who single-handedly created Russian poetry in the nineteenth century were remarkably linked in their themes of friendship, tears, auguries, desolation, the figure of death as a woman, visiting familiar and long-forgotten places, ghosts, hatred of the mob, hoping to be understood by the next generation, prophecy, mental illness, and everyone dying in a duel or in Baden-Baden.

If this second group of readers has not yet lost hope in Russian verse, there are alternatives: for the nineteenth century there is the collection of translations by Alan Myers called *An Age Ago*. (The book includes a foreword by Joseph Brodsky, one of the poet's most acute and economical essays, on the acceleration of time and the twentieth century's suspicion that everything had already been expressed by the nineteenth.) Myers's versions rhyme and scan, but they relate their sorrows and joys accompanied by at least a few chords on the piano, and sometimes by a violin. *An Age Ago* is also organized so that the themes echo very clearly.

Here is Nabokov's version of the first stanza from Tyutchev's "Last Love" (1852-1854) one of the eeriest poems in his "Denisieva Cycle," dedicated to a woman twenty-three years younger than the poet, with whom he carried on a desperate and illicit love affair until she died of tuberculosis:

> Love at the closing of our days
> is apprehensive and very tender.
> Glow brighter, brighter, farewell rays
> of one last love in its evening splendor.

And here is Myers's version:

> Ah, when our last years come in sight,
> How sweet, how ominous love's onset …
> Shine on, shine on, departing light,
> As love's last gleaming fades to sunset.

Myers's version is more haunting for two details. The first is the decision to retain, after "onset," Tyutchev's distinctive ellipsis, which the poet uses throughout his work to indicate a kind of trailing-off of the melody, or a pause in which to listen for something not yet—or never meant to be—said. Sometimes Tyutchev will use the ellipsis to conclude entire poems, so that the last phrase remains vibrating. The second detail is the use of the word "ominous": the sense of the Russian is of a speaker who, late in life, is overcome by a feeling of love inextricably bound up with its own, and his own, ending, and so he loves all the more tenderly and "more superstitiously." Whereas "apprehensive" implies worry and caution, "ominous" captures the sense of impossible-to-place twilight dread, which colors the poet's lovestruck vision.

As for better English impressions of twentieth-century Russian poetry, there is the terrific *Stray Dog Cabaret* by Paul Schmidt, not so much a collection of translations as a sequence of performances in an underworld poetry revue whose voices include, among others, Mayakovsky, Blok, Mandelstam, Tsvetaeva and Akhmatova. Here is a stanza from Aleksandr Blok's famous steamy poem about wine drinkers in the version by Nabokov, who calls it "The Strange Lady":

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And her taut silks,
her hat with its tenebrous plumes,
her slender bejeweled hand
waft legendary magic.

And here is the same stanza from Schmidt, who titles his version, "The Lady Nobody Knows":

Her dress is silk, it whispers legends
and moves in waves against her skin;
her hat is a forest of black feathers,
her narrow fingers glow with rings.

Schmidt embellishes, although less than one might think—all of a sudden we are in the presence of something incalculable, erotic, phantasmal, and glamorous.

Which brings us to the third set of readers: the people who love poetry. Slogging through *Verses and Versions*, these readers will quickly forget the distinction between Nabokov's literal translations and his formal translations, and focus instead on what both lack: music. Throughout his career Nabokov underlined his impatience with, and his intolerance for, music. In a passage from his autobiography, he notes that music affects him "merely as an arbitrary succession of more or less irritating sounds." And he continues: "Under certain emotional circumstances I can stand the spasms of a rich violin, but the concert piano and all wind instruments bore me in small doses and flay me in larger ones." Nowhere is this sentiment more apparent than in his translations of Russian poetry, which are for the most part drained of melody. In his prose, Nabokov often engineers a dazzling construction that produces the effect of a strange harmony, as in this example, from *Pale Fire*: "A remembered spread of colored sand bore the thirty-year-old patterned imprint of Oleg's shoe, as immortal as the tracks of an Egyptian child's tame gazelle made thirty centuries ago on blue Nilotic bricks drying in the sun." But alliteration is percussion, and there are other instruments. Readers in search of poetry will have to go back to rooting around in the junkyard, or waiting by the payphone for a spectral call, as before.

II.

There is one disquieting figure whose absence from *Verses and Versions*, except in a brief mention in the introduction and a throwaway jibe from Nabokov, haunts the book. He is Edmund Wilson, whose fraught and generous influence played an important role in Nabokov's early career in America, and who became his antagonist in the colossal disagreement over *Eugene Onegin*. Nabokov met Wilson shortly after arriving in America in 1940, and, within a few months, Wilson, who was at the height of his power in the literary world, set him up reviewing books and publishing translations in *The New Republic*. Wilson was its literary editor at the time.

Practically every facet of Nabokov's early literary career in America reflected Wilson's influence: the books published by *New Directions*, the stories and poems published in Klaus Mann's magazine *Decision* and in *The Atlantic* and *The New Yorker*. Wilson helped Nabokov get the Guggenheim Fellowship that enabled him to work on the relentlessly literal translation of *Onegin*, the project which would be at the center of the surprisingly vicious and enduring feud that demolished their friendship. Their correspondence shows them fondly exchanging puns, books, and socks, arguing, meeting for lunch, reminiscing, and obsessing over feats of prestidigitation, of which Wilson was an amateur practitioner. Nabokov played a significant role in Wilson's project of learning Russian and making a study of Russian literature, which culminated in the collection of essays *A Window on Russia: For the Use of Foreign Readers*. The two of them even planned to collaborate on a book about Russian literature.

What they did collaborate on was a translation of Pushkin's *Mozart and Salieri*, a verse play on genius, poetic inspiration, and envy, based on the legend that Mozart was poisoned by Antonio Salieri, the court composer of Vienna, who could not stand his rival's effortless brilliance. The translation was published in April, 1941 in this magazine, and it is the only example of a work on which Nabokov collaborated with another writer. It stands out in *Verses and Versions* for its clarity. Why, then, is Wilson's contribution acknowledged nowhere in the book, particularly not in the extensive endnotes, most of which come straight from the commentary to *Onegin* anyway? Nabokov spoke openly about the partnership in interviews, and his early correspondence with Wilson is full of references to it. That Wilson had actually worked with Nabokov on a translation project, and that the result was a noticeable rise in lucidity, adds nuance to the frantic remonstrances of the later battle.

Until 1964, Wilson refrained from reviewing any of Nabokov's novels, which, after *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (one of Nabokov's best books and one of the least read), he consistently disliked. But when Nabokov published his translation of *Onegin*, Wilson went on the attack. Wilson may have felt that his entire project of guarding the common sense of the American idiom was at stake in the face of Nabokov's wrenched syntax and preference for obsolete diction. In his review of the translation, Wilson gives one of the dictionary-diving sequences—"rememorating, producement, curvate, habitude, rummers, familistic, gloam, dit, shippon and scrab"—which, depending on who is writing, appear in pieces on Nabokov as either lists of gems or lists of crimes. He goes on to assault Nabokov for the "bald and awkward language" of his translation; accuses him of harboring "sado-masochistic Dostoevskian tendencies" with which he "seeks to torture both the reader and himself by flattening Pushkin out and denying to his own powers the scope for their full play"; and calls him "the least modest of men," whose work suffers "mainly from a lack of common sense." The piece was so hostile and far-fetched that one reader wrote in proposing that the review had been crafted by Nabokov himself, as an appendix to *Pale Fire*.

Like Wilson's review, Nabokov's rejoinder was wildly sharp. He refers to himself as "a patient confidant of [Wilson's] long and hopeless infatuation with Russian," and recalls how Wilson's pronunciation when reading *Onegin* aloud was so full of "jaw-twisting haws and rather endearing little barks that utterly jumbled the rhythm" that it "soon had us both in stitches." He makes a brief catalog of Wilson's "ghastly blunders" and deplores his "mixture of pompous aplomb and peevish ignorance." The effects of the feud lasted for years, and the two men hardly spoke again, despite several attempts at reconciliation.

In his review of Nabokov's translation of *Onegin*, Wilson quotes several paragraphs whose style he considers especially stilted ("Farewell, pacific sites! / Farewell, secluded refuge!"), and comments: "Such passages sound like the products of those computers which are supposed to translate Russian into English." Was Wilson right? Here is Nabokov's translation of Chapter III, Verse XX, a night conversation between the female lead Tatiana and her nurse:

"I am in love," whispered anew
to the old crone with sorrow she.
"Friend of my heart, you are not well."
"Leave me. I am in love."
And meantime the moon beamed
and with dark light irradiated
the pale charms of Tatiana

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and her loose hair,
and drops of tears, and, on a benchlet,
before the youthful heroine,
a kerchief on her hoary head,
the little crone in a long "body warmer";
and in the stillness everything
dozed by the inspirative moon.

And here is the text as rendered by the Yahoo Babel Fish translator online:

"I am fallen in love," sear again
to old lady with the misfortune it.
- Heart friend, you is unhealthy.
"Leave me: I am fallen in love."
And meanwhile moon shone
And it lit up by languid light Tatianas
pale [krasy],
And the dissolved Vlasas,
And the drop of tears, and on the bench
Before the heroine of young,
With the shawl on the head of grey,
Old lady in the long padded jacket;
And everything dozed in the silence
With the inspiring moon.

Pushkin's *raspushchennye vlasy*, rendered literally as Tatiana's "loose hair" (in Russian, as in French, the word for "hair" is plural), becomes in the computerized version a group of ghostly presences all mysteriously named "Vlasa," recalling the "'secondary' dream characters" who, as Nabokov noted in his book on Gogol, "pop out at every at every turn of the play (or novel, or story), to flaunt for a second their life-like existence," never to be seen again.

Nabokov's *Onegin* translation remains an emblematic mad literary project, with elements that bring to mind an Aquinas-crazed scholastic in a monastery, an *Anatomy of Melancholy* told in footnotes, a fantasy chronicle accompanied by a gigantic companion volume explaining its legends. It is infuriating and perplexing. It may possess a certain willful brilliance, but there is something grotesque about it. Poetic translation involves a large and subtle combination of factors, and it may be that Nabokov's *Onegin*, with its remorseless commitment to a certain sort of precision, has that quality of unnatural humorlessness characteristic of any complex situation in which a single element is favored and emphasized to the exclusion of all the rest. This, incidentally, is the exact opposite of Pushkin's great poem, with its prodigious variety and the thrilling unexpectedness of its rhymes.

Although the introduction to *Verses and Versions* points to the accuracy rating of between 98 and 100 percent assigned to Nabokov by a Russian scholar (Nabokov's *Onegin* was begging for just such a calculation!), Nabokov's versions have the paradoxical consequence of revealing how subjective even a literal translation is. While he succeeds in adding very little that is not present in the original, the most common pitfall among formal versions, his baffling diction and his commitment to warped syntax produce an effect more of singularity than of accuracy. Literal translation, like any other kind, is asymptotic: it is always approaching the solution but never reaching it. And the gap between the original and the new version can be filled in only subjectively, depending on one's aesthetic sense of what to keep and what to give up. Beyond a certain level of rudimentary meaning, there is no proof in translation, there is only persuasion, even if one lashes together a raft of a thousand footnotes and tries to float it across. ◆

Peter Green
ANCIENT EVENINGS

SEX AND SENSUALITY IN THE ANCIENT WORLD
By Giulia Sissa
Translated by George Staunton
(Yale University Press, 224 pp., $38)

PERHAPS THE most interesting finding of the two Kinsey reports on sexual behavior published in 1948 and 1953, and thus early harbingers of the mid-century revolution, was the enormous gap it revealed between accepted social and religious norms and what actually went on behind closed doors. There was much talk of hypocrisy, but this missed the point. As Aristotle stressed long ago, the powerful (and intensely enjoyable) spontaneous sexual impulse was there to ensure the continuation of mankind, just as in most other creatures, especially fellow mammals. What he did not point out were the endless variations on the procreative objective that some of these mammals, mankind most noticeably, managed to discover in their pursuit of pleasure, by way of the sexual imagination; and, countering this, the enormous edifice of social rules and often bizarre myths with which human authority, through the ages, has sought to discipline desire, or, when this proved impossible, to ensure that its less civic forms, however vigorous, remained out of sight, forbidden, officially unthinkable.

From antiquity until very recent times, this contrapuntal system, with all its frustrations, was kept firmly in place, and served a kind of social purpose. What shocked the public about the Kinsey reports was their reminder of what the system was there to do—promote a socially acceptable myth; and of the gap between the myth itself and the facts that underlay it. What caused increasing anger was the realization—something that Carol Groneman's heavily documented study *Nymphomania: A History* reveals in scarifying detail—of how deeply these fundamental myths about sex were generated by, and were the instruments of, those in authority, be they statesmen, educators, religious leaders, or lawyers. Century after century, fluctuating cultural norms of sex have been proclaimed and, where publicly flouted, enforced, by ruling bodies. Century after century, clandestine delightful activity has blithely or guiltily ignored them.

The vigorous exposure, during the last half-century, of every conceivable form of sexual activity has transformed Western society. The love that once dared not speak its name began to trumpet even louder than its straight competitor. It took AIDS to put an effective brake on the Swinging Seventies, and the new freedoms, even so, were what continued to get most coverage. Comparatively few of our innumerable writers on sex and the sexual revolution promote the views of the (mostly) silent majority, and those that do are regularly targeted as sexist troglodytes, or worse.

Yet just how widespread, even today, are those freedoms? The truth is that the sex in the news, the noisy and glamorous and politically incendiary stuff, has always belonged to various sub-cultures, some more celebrated than others. This meant that it applied, in the last resort, to a surprisingly small percentage of the population. A solid majority remained, and remains, as respectable and conformist—perhaps with the occasional unpublicized slip-up—as even those public

Peter Green is currently Whichard Distinguished Visiting Professor at East Carolina University and the author most recently of The Hellenistic Age: A Short History *(Modern Library).*

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watchdogs Thomas Bowdler (the expurgator of Shakespeare) and Mrs. Grundy could have wished for. Respectability may be dull, but it still has the votes.

There is also an unspoken class factor involved. Mrs. Grundy never had more vociferous public supporters than the working and (in particular) the genteel lower-middle classes, for whom normality has always been a powerful watchword, and who have always been ready to shy contemptuous brickbats at any thesis or creative work, from Freud's to Picasso's, that challenged it. The idea that even licit sex was something unclean and not to be discussed, except in dirty jokes, was and, surprisingly, remains extraordinarily widespread. Tolerance for deviation from the alleged sexual norm has advanced indeed—but not all that far, as we have been unpleasantly reminded by the passing of Proposition 8 in California. All the money that the Mormons poured into support of this attack on same-sex marriage would have been for naught if there were not a solid core of voters hospitable to their arguments.

It is, then, of some interest to find a virtually identical scenario in the ancient world. This curious coincidence has long been obscured by scholars who generally concentrate on the literate upper classes (the source, in Greece and Rome, of most of the evidence), and even there have their own preferred agenda to promote, most notably in connection with Athens's aristocratic tradition of idealized cultural pederasty. We are by now all too familiar with the arguments promoting not only Athens, but ancient Greece generally, as uniquely supportive of homoerotic relationships. The claims of Michel Foucault and Kenneth Dover in favor of macho penetrationism—the superior male sexually dominating the weaker vessels of either gender—as the linchpin of Greco-Roman erotic morality, not to mention James Davidson's objection to this "sodomania," as he called it, for concentrating on the sexual act to the exclusion of love, are all played out against an assumption of overall Hellenic homoeroticism. And they regularly generalize from the evidence of intellectually and culturally limited groups—as does Giulia Sissa, whose new book seeks to restore some heterosexual balance to this emotional picture.

In fact, there is evidence hinting at the existence of a silent Greek majority uncommonly like the one still around today: no accident that the Greek term for the genitalia, *aidoia*, means, literally, the "shameful parts." At Athens, except for the licensed ribaldry of Old Comedy, all drama (the only surviving literary document directed at a mass audience) was as sexually prudish as any Victorian could have wished: when Euripides made Phaedra proposition her stepson Hippolytus onstage, the outcry was such that he had to re-write the play. Also, for a supposedly homoerotic culture, the almost total absence of this motif, as opposed to the prevalence of marital relations, good or bad, in fifth-century tragedy, is remarkable. Even in comedy we find weddings as a regular happy ending, while some of the most vigorous satire is directed, with crude venom, against sodomized politicians and philosophical hot air. It is often remarked that the plot of Aristophanes's *Lysistrata*—a sex strike by wives to stop their husbands' warmongering—is unreal because of all the other sexual outlets, from boys to whores, easily available; but the critics never seem to have considered that enough of the audience may have been sufficiently respectable to make the idea at least plausible.

The history of sexual habits and mores in antiquity is, in essence, restricted to that of the educated upper classes whose views on the subject have been preserved, whether in their writings or on the surviving illustrated ceramic ware that they bought. There are exceptions, of course: gravestones inscribed with loving marital epitaphs and, later, little commissioned quatrains to favorite children, servants, and pets, which hint at an ordinary recognizable world going on quite apart from that of the literate, propertied, and slave-owning upper crust—poets, playwrights, philosophers, historians, government officials, memoirists, and, eventually, theologians. But it is these, like it or not, for whose erotic evolution and culturally elitist theories we have the evidence, and who supply the highly cerebral nexus of *Sex and Sensuality in the Ancient World*.

That evolution extends from Homer's civilized aristocratic women of a bygone age, by way of post–Dark Age sour misogyny, to a post-Solonian enskyment of handsome ephebes, followed by the Hellenistic reversion to individualism in marriage, and, finally, the Roman obsession with male aggressiveness and warm baths, which in turn loses out to Christian monasticism, holy dirt, and an obsession with virginity. This saga is played out to the accompaniment of nervous-nellie Pandora legends, philosophical pussyfooting about the ideals of male adolescence, and bizarre medical notions, from the Hippocratics to Galen, about human anatomy and the biological relationship of female to male, some of which make the Adam's rib theory look sensible by comparison. Though modern scholars are too polite to say so, much of the ancient world's take on sex is not only primitive (that taboo term) but, in contemporary terms, sublimely silly.

Giulia Sissa is too earnest to see the funny side of much that she describes. Her approach to this tradition is intellectually conventional, in that her dominant interest is in analyzing what theorists and writers thought was going on, rather than aiming for the historical actuality (sometimes, indeed, she treats the two as identical); but she is at the same time robustly opposed to much current conventional wisdom. In particular she objects to the phallic reductionism preached by Foucault and documented by Dover. Like Davidson, she sees this emphasis on the mechanics of erect sex as excluding a wide range of erotic emotions, above all that sensuality which she describes as "anguish and delight, want and anticipation, attraction and seduction, rapture and strategy." Or, in sum, love as opposed to sex.

In sharp contrast to Davidson, however, Sissa sees femininity as the stimulant source for all of these longings and relations—primarily in the female (she quotes Lucretius on "the woman who emanates love from her entire body," *toto iactans e corpore amorem*), but also in the *cinaedus*, "the male with an effeminate, languorous and loose-limbed body." For her, the "pure virility" of primitive man needs a healthy additive of femininity to become civilized, to reach that point in human relationships where the ideal is a "longing for reciprocity rather than unilateral possession." No surprise that one of her star witnesses is that subversively un-Roman poet Ovid.

No surprise, also, that so dedicated an intellectual analyst should show such indifference concerning the historical background, the historical causes, of those vast changes in social attitude that she encounters as she progresses through the centuries. Sometimes, too, she seems a little lacking in plain common sense. Her opening chapter, on "Desire," offers striking examples of this. Sissa is very comfortable with the sophisticated sensibilities of Penelope in the later books of the *Odyssey* (without ever seeing them as evidence for a highly developed Bronze Age culture preserved, as it were, in literary aspic); but her interpretation of what is actually happening can take one aback.

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What, precisely, is Penelope's attraction for the suitors who are eating her out of house and home? It's sex, says Sissa, who takes their expressed determination in this matter very literally, and notes that the lucky winner will remove his prize elsewhere, and not move in. But wait. Penelope has a son who is not far short of being their coeval, and she is certainly old enough to be the mother of most of them. They go weak at the knees for *her*? In fact they have sex with her maids. The Freudian implications are plain, but as an explanation for the suitors' behavior they run a very poor second to the status and the power to be gained by marrying the king's (presumed) widow.

Sissa also insists that although Penelope's love for Odysseus (always, irritatingly, referred to in this Greek context by his Romanized name, Ulysses) still endures, "she has now set out upon a route that leads to another bed," and that the test of the bow is a sign of this. But she hasn't, and it isn't. Penelope's delicate fencing with the ragged stranger (who is of course Odysseus himself), and the goose-dream of the eagle-as-avenger that she imparts to him, along with the proposed bow-test, makes it clear that she is pretty sure she has recognized her longed-for husband and is shrewdly establishing a situation in which he will not only win the contest (no one else can string his bow) but also rid her, without being asked, of the horde of freeloading males who are making her life a misery. At the same time Sissa claims that Odysseus "is not interested in [Calypso's] love." Tsk, tsk. Two lines before the passage she cites comes the deadly little phrase showing that in fact, after a liaison with the complaisant nymph lasting some years, he has become bored with her. You have to watch Sissa: this supposed lack of interest is then picked up and used as an argument elsewhere.

For Sissa, it seems clear, text (not to mention the spin that she can impart to it) is what matters, but context, especially where historical reality is concerned, remains a vulgar irrelevance. From Homer she moves on to a scrutiny of Hesiod. Woman has suddenly become a nagging, greedy, demanding golddigger, somehow responsible for all "sorrows, unrest, anguish, work and worries," and for tempting hapless men to ruin by making them feel, for the first time, that they lack something, and thereby encouraging them not to stick with the new ethic of being content with one's lot. That this metamorphosis may have had something to do with the collapse of the Bronze Age civilization recalled in the *Odyssey*, and the horrendous social disintegration, long familiar to archaeologists, brought in with the Dark Age that followed, can hardly have escaped Sissa's notice; but all we hear, as a gloss on the text, is that "ethical thought appears to lose that Homeric trust in the possibility of experiencing the sensation of plenitude and of not lacking something." Well, yes.

With a casual couple of words on Solon and Herodotus (were they too mundane?) Sissa jumps forward, with evident relief, to Plato, noting in the interim period the development of the philosophical assertion that human desires and appetites are, by definition, insatiable (and targeting in this context the word *aplêstia*, which literally means "unfillability"). Again, there is no attempt to explain the phenomenon, in social or any other terms. *Also sprach* Plato, and this must suffice. But what did lead to this hysterical extension of the Delphic maxim "nothing in excess," to Plato's notion that the appetitive part of the soul is like "a gluttonous beast chained to the body's feeding trough"? I suspect it was the rapidly growing capacity for abstraction, which in turn sharpened intellectual distaste for the coarser realities of life. Desire came to be seen (at least by the philosophical elite) as an indiscriminate killjoy, and ideas as the sole source of pure and lasting pleasure. The ordinary Athenian, as is all too clear from Aristophanes's comedies, had less rarefied goals, but he rates low, if at all, in Plato's and Sissa's order of things.

After invoking the notion of Heraclitean flux to prove that in the Platonic view of things "erotic desire is modeled on the digestion of food and reduced to an uninterrupted flow," Sissa winds up with a slap at Foucault for underestimating the ontological factor in Greek ethics, and moves briskly on to Pleasure. Here she abandons any attempt to discuss the phenomenon in evolutionary, much less historical, terms: in the first two pages her witnesses include Hesiod, Homer, Plato, Aristophanes, Aristotle, and Pompeian frescoes. A famous fourth-century court case alleging sexual misconduct, Aeschines's prosecution of Timarchus, is then tied in with Plato's *Symposium* to take a retrospective look at Alcibiades, Socrates, and the Athenian aristocratic idealization of handsome ephebes, the pursuit of *eros kalos*, "beautiful love," that in theory rises above sex. Sissa also throws in a decidedly Hellenistic interpretation of pleasure as "the extinction of pain and an end to unease."

This scattershot and chronologically loose use of evidence can be stimulating, but it remains historically questionable. Sissa is right to emphasize the exaggerations of philosophers and rhetoricians when asserting individual freedom in the Athenian democracy, but she blurs the full ethical evolution with her *olla podrida* of evidence culled from different centuries; and her preoccupation with ideas rather than facts often leads her to conflate the two when dealing with public affairs. If she knows that the Athenian democracy remained for the most part in the hands of a few old families, it is not something she chooses to mention, and she appears to believe (though in this she is not alone) that Alcibiades, the quintessential example of the all-hat-and-no-cattle self-promoter,

Hardy's Sky

A sky out of Thomas Hardy: bleak, cloud-broken, swollen with wind-shiver, grey-gold with touches of crucifixion and apocalypse, everything a flight, a fugue, so the small voices of these slate juncos make music a huddle of refugees might make—bedraggled, bent under tattered loads, feeling the weather change, the air harden, the taste of things grow *harsh and crude* on their forced march towards haggard light, towards some poor haven, this endless trek against weather, fires blossoming from the sky ceiling, the ferocious *thump* of air waves pushing them, staggering ear drums, pure dread bursting in scatterflash and stuttercrack, these terminal fireworks at odds with all past knowledge. So the beat goes on, no end to it, and in this Thomas Hardy sky you'd see, had you eyes for it, words like *numb* and *wasting* inscribed, and *sad* or *dim*, *drearisome*, *wan*, and everything tucked in like a heart in its beating chest of bone so the whole body thrums with it, beaten through and through by it.

EAMON GRENNAN

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had "great skills as a general." Who, as Byron asked, remembers what battles he won? But the upshot of the discussion is, once again, that *eros orthos*, just love or upright love (did Sissa remember that *orthos* can also mean "erect"?) should transcend mere sex.

What, then, is to become of sensuality, not least when the pre-Pandoran myth is of a golden age unencumbered with women or intercourse (a mode of reproduction that has always had its critics)? Plato, as Sissa points out, in one of his more exotic myths, imagined that "the penis and the womb introduced the mindlessness and the beastly nature of the appetitive part of the soul into human anatomy," men having previously had neither a penis nor a woman to put a penis in, a state that is conducive (according to Plato) to natural bliss. The penis was to prove a tyrannical and recalcitrant beast, impervious to reason. (Augustine, eagerly picking up on Plato centuries later, thought an erection was the mark of Original Sin.) After all this, Aristotle's biological common sense—his view of the sexual drive as guarantee of natural procreation, with the penis a kind of spontaneous ideal slave—comes as welcome relief. Moralists, alas, preferred Plato.

Aristotle was also less bizarre in his assessment of female biology. Though he did argue that the humid secretion generated during a woman's arousal was largely restricted to blondes, this was sane in comparison with the Hippocratic theory, which not only regarded this secretion as a spermatic ejaculation vital for procreation, but also believed that the neck of the uterus and the vagina were a penis and foreskin turned inside out. Where this left the clitoris (which both Greeks and Romans knew about) is anyone's guess, and Sissa, whether out of modesty or because her sources are silent on the subject, never mentions it.

Having thus set the scene to her own satisfaction, Sissa moves on to a somewhat idiosyncratic survey of social relationships, her generalizations happily unhampered by any strong concern with historical change or evolution. Marriage was "a euphoric event" in which the bride had "an erection, albeit an internal and invisible one." This may be thought silly, but (as so often with Sissa) it is not half as silly as some of the ancient beliefs that she parades—in this case the firm medical conviction, from Hippocrates to Galen, that there was no such part of the female anatomy as the membrane known as the hymen. Sissa suggests this was because the idea offended the theoretical concept of the female apparatus as an open container. Surely it indicates instead that actual birthing and obstetrics were restricted to female midwives, who, being lower class and women, were ignored by the medical theorists. What, then, about the Roman mythological wedding addressee, Hymenaeus? Probably "based on a lexical coincidence."

Much more sensible are Sissa's sections on children (evidence ranging from Sophocles's Oedipus to briefs by the fourth-century inheritance lawyer Isaeus), and the legalities of individuals in their communities, with females always at a disadvantage ("at any age, a woman was a statutory minor"). Sissa cannot resist a section on sex in tragedy, though her claim that tragic plots always "conjure up the image of intense erotic passions" is overdoing it a bit: what about Aeschylus's *Persians* or Phrynichus's *Capture of Miletus*? Her questions take one aback. What, she asks, "if Penelope were to act like Clytemnestra; what if Clytemnestra had emulated Penelope?" To which the obvious answer would seem to be: no *Oresteia* and a very different ending (though no less mayhem) in the *Odyssey*. But Sissa has a less prosaic conclusion: "The bed, which is never put on view, is the real stage." Why, I wonder, did we never think of that?

By far the most interesting part of Sissa's survey describes the progression in Roman literature from sexuality to sensuality. It does not start well. Lucretius, presented with Epicurus's denial of "insatiable desire," reverts to Plato's notion that the pleasure in sexual passion is illusory, even pathological. But then, presto, here comes sophisticated Ovid, claiming that the solution is the shaping of love through art (*arte regendus amor*). His famous *Art of Love* cultivates a nice balance between masculine hardness and feminine softness. He is also, as a master of metamorphosis, inclined to believe that the adolescent, the boy with feminine limbs (*puer membris muliebribus*), is a kind of chrysalis, whose maturing into a tough and hairy male actually represents a change of gender, thus validating the Roman penetrationist's code. The crude pursuit of promiscuity—the Lucretian *Venus vulgivaga,* who sounds like an energetic Russian tart—is to be tamed and civilized by art and faithfulness (*fides*). To explain the passive queen, such as Juvenal's Virro, Sissa reminds us of the ancient medical theory that sodomy, by channeling semen into the anal region, creates "an insatiable and feminine sensuality."

And at last we are delivered to Jesus, if you will pardon the expression. Finally Sissa offers up a lively sketch of how this world of phallic high jinks, philosophical puritanism, and hot/cold moist/dry sensuality was received by early Christianity. Better to marry than to burn, said Paul: or as Sissa nicely puts it, "philosophy and family were two orders of incompatible commitments." Sexual desire became seen as a punishment for Original Sin. Virginity was the ideal; the bride of Christ could concentrate wholly on her heavenly spouse. Wealth and family were a pale second-best, and sex, even if sanctioned in marriage, though not technically an evil, was time wasted on the flesh rather than devoted to God. "Attention to God is erotic time. Virginity is a passion." In this sense, early Christian marriage seems more designed for the avoidance of fornication than for the traditional objective of being fruitful and multiplying. Plato would have found this line of thought quite congenial.

But the ideal of contemplative virginity raises an obvious problem, of which Sissa is well aware: if the ideal were to be achieved, where, then, would future generations of worshippers be found? "This fervour could have relegated early Christianity to the marginality of a fundamentalist sect incapable of regeneration." The ethical compromises that Sissa describes cannot conceal the contempt for ordinary people implicit in the theory, and visible, century after century, in all such concepts. For the theorists there is always a despised silent majority, from the landless men whom Cleisthenes, as a last desperate political measure, enfranchised, to the *tiers état* of Plato's *Republic*. Tradesmen and artisans were beyond the pale: in Thebes they had to have abandoned their callings for ten years before they could run for office. Scientists from Euclid to Archimedes were united in their contempt for applied rather than theoretical science.

Paul and all the Christian apologists knew perfectly well that they could rely on a majority of ordinary people, operating by their supposedly vulgar and inferior creative instincts, to keep the world safe for a privileged clique of God-directed virgins. And so we are back to where we began: the ancient sex for which we have the evidence belongs to a literate upper-class minority cult, indifferent and sometimes even hostile to the mass of the population. Unfortunately, it is this minority with which Giulia Sissa and many other intellectuals are exclusively aligned. ◆

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Washington Diarist

Love Me I'm a Liberal

Can liberalism still explain itself? Does it remember its concepts and its words? It has been many decades since liberalism could fall back upon the power of platitudes; the platitudinous authority now belongs to the other side. Cliché may represent a failure in literature, but in politics it is the evidence of a philosophy's success. The repudiation of George W. Bush is not in itself a renovation of liberalism, and neither is the apotheosis of Barack Obama. The public has not yet broken the grip of the conservative discourse that has dominated America for a generation. Consider the insane headline on *Newsweek*'s cover, "We are all socialists now": an exclamation of its inner Hannity, as if the president is preparing to abolish private property or expropriate the means of production. All that is happening, comrades, is that our democratically constituted central government is acting to protect the whole of our economy by taking over, for a period, a part of our economy. But second natures, which are made more by culture than by thought, are not easily extinguished. Sean Wilentz was shrewd to contain the Clinton years in his recent study of "the age of Reagan," because Bill Clinton's inglorious role in the history of liberalism was to teach it to sleep with its enemy. Insofar as his renunciation of ideology was the revival of an experimental frame of mind about public policy, the good sense of "best practices," it was a welcome turn; but it was also a lousy defeatism about the war of ideas, a loss of interest, or of nerve, about first principles. On the day that Clinton pragmatically announced that "the era of big government is over," liberalism forgot itself. Pragmatism has a dark side. The allure of pragmatism was lost on the conservatives, of course. They sought power so that they could act on what they believed. And when they got their chance, they ran the republic down in almost all its aspects. We must not draw the wrong conclusion from the rubble. The problem was *what* they believed, not *that* they believed.

The most discouraging surprise of Barack Obama's early days in office, days of emergency, was the new administration's shirking of clarity, its reluctance to attach the grandeur of its initiatives to the grandeur of liberalism. Instead the president's distaste for division, and his Chicago practicality, set the tone. How came it to be that in the aftermath of the greatest liberal victory in our lifetime John Boehner held the stage? Of course the views of the Republicans must be respected, not least when a few of their votes may be needed to do the work of rescue and reform; but political respect must not be confused with intellectual respect. The response of the right to the crisis in America was to flee to its catechism. The Republicans propose to bail out the economy with doctrine. Unemployment is 7.6 percent and rising, and they say: let them eat Friedman. When billions and billions of dollars are needed for the Pentagon (fine with me) and for Wall Street, it is damn the zeroes, full speed ahead—but when the prospect of relief for ordinary Americans in trouble rears its fair and compassionate head, the deficit desperately matters again. The Republicans are not only heartless, they are also hypocritical, since the cause of all this misery was the market abandon that they promoted so messianically. These are the people who would have privatized, that is, destroyed, Social Security: how can their protests not be met vehemently? This vehemence is not "partisanship," it is analysis. It is not "populism," it is liberalism.

But I want the president to say so. I want the president to tell the American people that, contrary to what they have been taught for many years, government is a jewel of human association and an heirloom of human reason; that government, though it may do ill, does good; that a lot of the good that government does only it can do; that the size of government must be fitted to the size of its tasks, and so, for a polity such as ours, big government is the only government; that strong government comports well with strong freedom, unless Madison was wrong; that a government based on rights cannot exclude from its concern the adversities of the people who confer upon it its legitimacy, or consign their remediation to the charitable moods of a preferred and decadent few; that Ronald Reagan, when he proclaimed categorically, without exception or complication, that "government is not the solution to the problem, government is the problem," was a fool; and that nobody was ever rescued, or enlarged, by being left alone. For all its grotesqueness, American government is a beautiful thing. I want the president to continue the remedial lesson in the wisdom of liberalism by pointing out that, for Republicans and Democrats alike, economic policy is social policy. When they controlled the government, the conservatives enacted tax measures and fiscal measures and regulatory measures that fulfilled their vision of American society, and now that the liberals control the government they will do the same. Otherwise pork is all there is. A budget is a philosophy in numbers. The president should declare candidly, even ringingly, that not everything in his package is "pure" stimulus, and that he is indeed embarking upon an enterprise of state-building, because state-building is stimulus for anybody who can think beyond the next bonus or the next poll. And I want the president to add—he may gag on this inharmonious observation—that the values of liberalism and the values of conservatism are not the same values, even if compromises may be cobbled together; and that there is dignity in the contradictions.

So it is not enough that Obama was elected or that the stimulus, which may be too small, was passed. It is important also to know why. Conviction, too, must be shovel-ready. Democracy is the most mentally arduous form of government. No other system stands or falls on the quality of the individual's opinions. The pressures upon the formation of opinion are staggering, and they interfere mightily with clear deliberation: as Habermas puts it, mass opinion is not yet public opinion. In an open society, therefore, it is the intellectual duty of the citizen to search for the warrant for his views, to raise opinions into beliefs by means of reasons, right reasons, reasons conceived in the bravery of arguments. This is the only way to resist the regimentations of demagogues and entertainers. The justification of belief is a human adventure. And discovering the reason is like discovering the sunrise.

Leon Wieseltier

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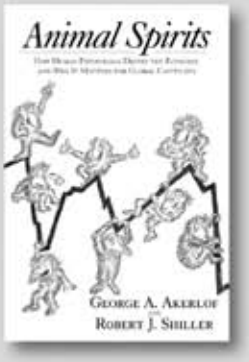

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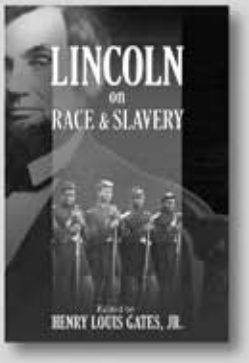

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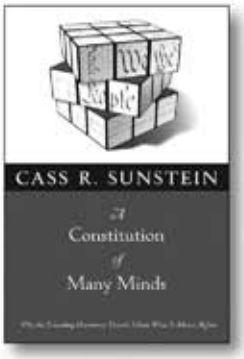

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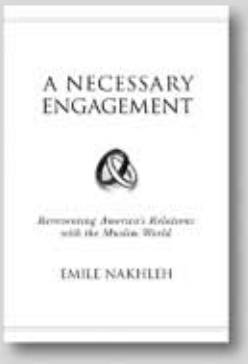

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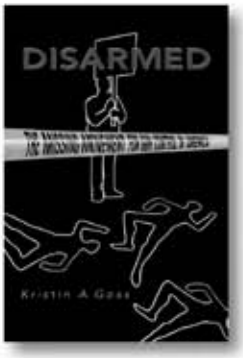

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